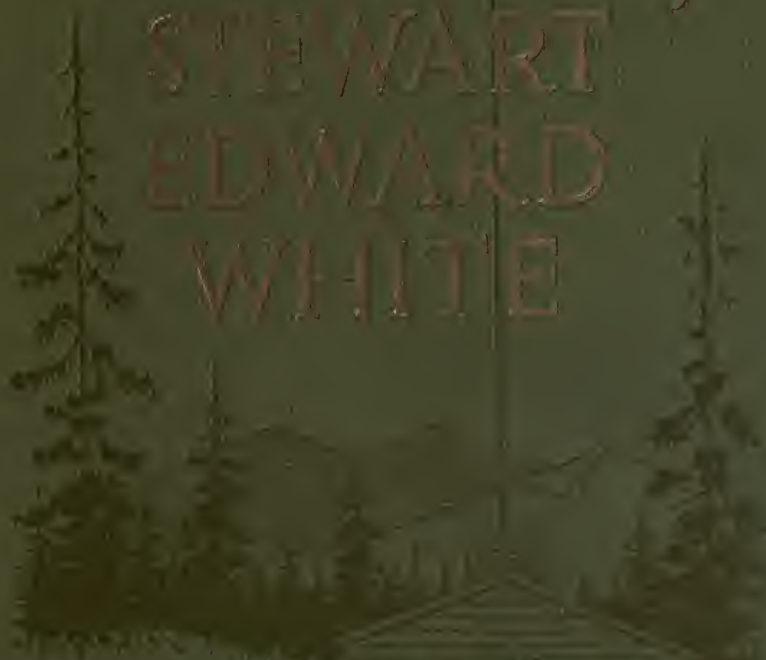
The WORKS of STEWART EDWARD WHITE



BLAZED TRAIL STORIES

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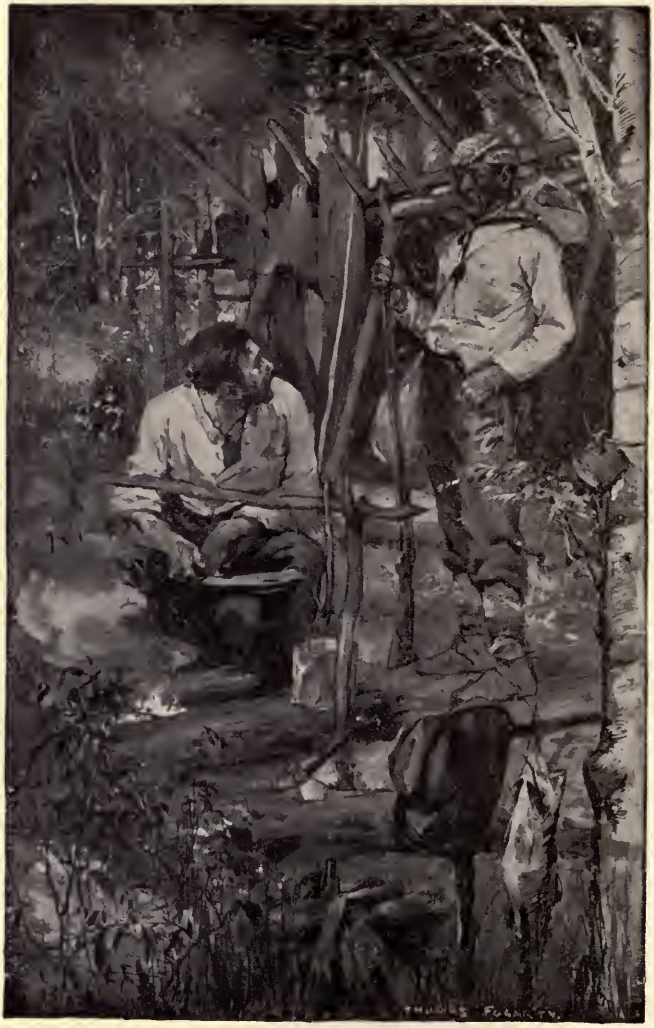
BLAZED TRAIL STORIES

AND

STORIES OF THE WILD LIFE



The WORKS of STEWART EDWARD WHITE

Garden City, New York
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
1913

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CONTENTS

PART I

BLAZED TRAIL STORIES

PAGE

THE RIVERMAN 8
THE FOREMAN 22
THE SCALER 39
THE RIVER-BOSS 58
THE FIFTH WAY 73
THE LIFE OF THE WINDS OF HEAVEN 83

PART II

STORIES OF THE WILD LIFE

THE GIRL WHO GOT RATTLED 111
BILLY'S TENDERFOOT 132
THE TWO CARTRIDGES 153
THE RACE 180
THE SAVING GRACE 198
THE PROSPECTOR 222
THE GIRL IN RED 246

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BLAZED TRAIL STORIES

I

THE RIVERMAN

I first met him one Fourth of July afternoon in the middle eighties. The sawdust streets and high board sidewalks of the lumber town were filled to the brim with people. The permanent population, dressed in the stiffness of its Sunday best, escorted gingham wives or sweethearts; a dozen outsiders like myself tried not to be too conspicuous in a city smartness; but the great multitude was composed of the men of the woods. I sat, chair-tilted by the hotel, watching them pass. Their heavy woollen shirts crossed by the broad suspenders, the red of their sashes or leather shine of their belts, their short kersey trousers "stagged" off to leave a gap between the knee and the heavily spiked "cork boots"—all these were distinctive enough of their class, but most interesting to me were the eyes that peered from beneath their little round hats tilted rakishly askew. They were all subtly alike, those eyes. Some were black, some were brown, or gray, or

blue, but all were steady and unabashed, all looked straight at you with a strange humorous blending of aggression and respect for your own business, and all without exception wrinkled at the corners with a suggestion of dry humor. In my half-conscious scrutiny I probably stared harder than I knew, for all at once a laughing pair of the blue eyes suddenly met mine full, and an ironical voice drawled,

"Say, bub, you look as interested as a man killing snakes. Am I your long-lost friend?"

The tone of the voice matched accurately the attitude of the man, and that was quite non-committal. He stood cheerfully ready to meet the emergency. If I sought trouble, it was here to my hand; or if I needed help he was willing to offer it.

"I guess you are," I replied, "if you can tell me what all this outfit's headed for."

He thrust back his hat and ran his hand through a mop of closely cropped light curls.

"Birling match," he explained briefly. "Come on."

I joined him, and together we followed the crowd to the river, where we roosted like cormorants on adjacent piles overlooking a patch of clear water among the filled booms.

"Drive's just over," my new friend informed me. "Rear come down last night. Fourther July celebration. This little town will scratch fer th' tall timber along about midnight when the boys goes in to take her apart."

A half-dozen men with peavies rolled a white-pine log of about a foot and a half diameter into the clear water, where it lay rocking back and forth, three or four feet from the boom piles. Suddenly a man ran the length of the boom, leaped easily into the air, and landed with both feet square on one end of the floating log. That end disappeared in an ankle-deep swirl of white foam, the other rose suddenly, the whole timber, projected forward by the shock, drove headlong to the middle of the little pond. And the man, his arms folded, his knees just bent in the graceful nervous attitude of the circus-rider, stood upright like a statue of bronze.

A roar approved this feat.

"That's Dickey Darrell," said my informant, "Roaring Dick. He's hell *and* repeat. Watch him."

The man on the log was small, with clean beautiful haunches and shoulders, but with hanging baboon arms. Perhaps his most striking feature was a mop of reddish-brown hair that

overshadowed a little triangular white face accented by two reddish-brown quadrilaterals that served as eyebrows and a pair of inscrutable chipmunk eyes.

For a moment he poised erect in the great calm of the public performer. Then slowly he began to revolve the log under his feet. The lofty gaze, the folded arms, the straight supple waist budged not by a hair's breadth; only the feet stepped forward, at first deliberately, then faster and faster, until the rolling log threw a blue spray a foot into the air. Then suddenly *slap! slap!* the heavy caulks stamped a reversal. The log came instantaneously to rest, quivering exactly like some animal that had been spurred through its paces.

"Magnificent!" I cried.

"Hell, that's nothing!" my companion repressed me, "anybody can birl a log. Watch this."

Roaring Dick for the first time unfolded his arms. With some appearance of caution he balanced his unstable footing into absolute immobility. Then he turned a somersault.

This was the real thing. My friend uttered a wild yell of applause which was lost in a general roar.

A long pike-pole shot out, bit the end of the timber, and towed it to the boom pile. Another man stepped on the log with Darrell. They stood facing each other, bent-kneed, alert. Suddenly with one accord they commenced to birl the log from left to right. The pace grew hot. Like squirrels treading a cage their feet twinkled. Then it became apparent that Darrell's opponent was gradually being forced from the top of the log. He could not keep up. Little by little, still moving desperately, he dropped back to the slant, then at last to the edge, and so off into the river with a mighty splash.

"Clean birled!" commented my friend.

One after another a half-dozen rivermen tackled the imperturbable Dick, but none of them possessed the agility to stay on top in the pace he set them. One boy of eighteen seemed for a moment to hold his own, and managed at least to keep out of the water even when Darrell had apparently reached his maximum speed. But that expert merely threw his entire weight into two reversing stamps of his feet, and the young fellow dove forward as abruptly as though he had been shied over a horse's head.

The crowd was by now getting uproarious and impatient of volunteer effort to humble Darrell's

challenge. It wanted the best, and at once. It began, with increasing insistence, to shout a name.

"Jimmy Powers!" it vociferated, "Jimmy Powers."

And then by shamefaced bashfulness, by profane protest, by muttered and comprehensive curses I knew that my companion on the other pile was indicated.

A dozen men near at hand began to shout. "Here he is!" they cried. "Come on, Jimmy." "Don't be a high banker." "Hang his hide on the fence."

Jimmy, still red and swearing, suffered himself to be pulled from his elevation and disappeared in the throng. A moment later I caught his head and shoulders pushing toward the boom piles, and so in a moment he stepped warily aboard to face his antagonist.

This was evidently no question to be determined by the simplicity of force or the simplicity of a child's trick. The two men stood half-crouched, face to face, watching each other narrowly, but making no move. To me they seemed like two wrestlers sparring for an opening. Slowly the log revolved one way; then slowly the other. It was a mere courtesy of salute. All at

once Dick birled three rapid strokes from left to right as though about to roll the log, leaped into the air and landed square with both feet on the other slant of the timber. Jimmy Powers felt the jar, and acknowledged it by the spasmodic jerk with which he counterbalanced Darrell's weight. But he was not thrown.

As though this daring and hazardous manœuvre had opened the combat, both men sprang to life. Sometimes the log rolled one way, sometimes the other, sometimes it jerked from side to side like a crazy thing, but always with the rapidity of light, always in a smother of spray and foam. The decided *spat, spat, spat* of the reversing blows from the caulked boots sounded like picket firing. I could not make out the different leads, feints, parries, and counters of this strange method of boxing, nor could I distinguish to whose initiative the various evolutions of that log could be described. But I retain still a vivid mental picture of two men nearly motionless above the waist, nearly vibrant below it, dominating the insane gyrations of a stick of pine.

The crowd was appreciative and partisan—for Jimmy Powers. It howled wildly, and rose thereby to ever higher excitement. Then it for-

got its manners utterly and groaned when it made out that a sudden splash represented its favourite, while the indomitable Darrell still trod the quarter-deck as champion birler for the year.

I must confess I was as sorry as anybody. I climbed down from my cormorant roost, and picked my way between the alleys of aromatic piled lumber in order to avoid the press, and cursed the little gods heartily for undue partiality in the wrong direction. In this manner I happened on Jimmy Powers himself seated dripping on a board and examining his bared foot.

"I'm sorry," said I behind him. "How did he do it?"

He whirled, and I could see that his laughing boyish face had become suddenly grim and stern, and that his eyes were shot with blood.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he growled disparagingly. "Well, that's how he did it."

He held out his foot. Across the instep and at the base of the toes ran two rows of tiny round punctures from which the blood was oozing. I looked very inquiring.

"He corked me!" Jimmy Powers explained. "Jammed his spikes into me! Stepped on my foot and tripped me, the——" Jimmy Powers certainly could swear.

"Why didn't you make a kick?" I cried.

"That ain't how I do it," he muttered, pulling on his heavy woollen sock.

"But no," I insisted, my indignation mounting. "It's an outrage! That crowd was with you. All you had to do was to *say* something——"

He cut me short. "And give myself away as a damn fool—sure Mike. I ought to know Dickey Darrell by this time, and I ought to be big enough to take care of myself." He stamped his foot into his driver's shoe and took me by the arm, his good humour apparently restored. "No, don't you lose any hair, bub; I'll get even with Roaring Dick."

That night, having by the advice of the proprietor moved my bureau and trunk against the bedroom door, I lay wide awake listening to the taking of the town apart. At each especially vicious crash I wondered if that might be Jimmy Powers getting even with Roaring Dick.

The following year, but earlier in the season, I again visited my little lumber town. In striking contrast to the life of that other midsummer day were the deserted streets. The landlord knew me, and after I had washed and eaten approached me with a suggestion.

"You got all day in front of you," said he; "why don't you take a horse and buggy and make a visit to the big jam? Everybody's up there more or less."

In response to my inquiry, he replied:

"They've jammed at the upper bend, jammed bad. The crew's been picking at her for near a week now, and last night Darrell was down to see about some more dynamite. It's worth seein'. The breast of her is near thirty foot high, and lots of water in the river."

"Darrell?" said I, catching at the name.

"Yes. He's rear boss this year. Do you think you'd like to take a look at her?"

"I think I should," I assented.

The horse and I jogged slowly along a deep sand road, through wastes of pine stumps and belts of hardwood beautiful with the early spring, until finally we arrived at a clearing in which stood two huge tents, a mammoth kettle slung over a fire of logs, and drying racks about the timbers of another fire. A fat cook in the inevitable battered derby hat, two bare-armed cookees, and a chore "boy" of seventy-odd summers were the only human beings in sight. One of the cookees agreed to keep an eye on my horse. I picked my way down a well-worn trail

toward the regular *clank, clank, click* of the peavies.

I emerged finally to a plateau elevated some fifty or sixty feet above the river. A half-dozen spectators were already gathered. Among them I could not but notice a tall, spare, broad-shouldered young fellow dressed in a quiet business suit, somewhat wrinkled, whose square, strong, clean-cut face and muscular hands were tanned by the weather to a dark umber-brown. In another moment I looked down on the jam.

The breast, as my landlord had told me, rose sheer from the water to the height of at least twenty-five feet, bristling and formidable. Back of it pressed the volume of logs packed closely in an apparently inextricable tangle as far as the eye could reach. A man near informed me that the tail was a good three miles up stream. From beneath this wonderful *chevaux de frise* foamed the current of the river, irresistible to any force less mighty than the statics of such a mass.

A crew of forty or fifty men were at work. They clamped their peavies to the reluctant timbers, heaved, pushed, slid, and rolled them one by one into the current, where they were caught and borne away. They had been doing this for

a week. As yet their efforts had made but slight impression on the bulk of the jam, but some time, with patience, they would reach the key-logs. Then the tangle would melt like sugar in the freshet, and these imperturbable workers would have to escape suddenly over the plunging logs to shore.

My eye ranged over the men, and finally rested on Dickey Darrell. He was standing on the slanting end of an upheaved log dominating the scene. His little triangular face with the accents of the quadrilateral eyebrows was pale with the blaze of his energy, and his chipmunk eyes seemed to flame with a dynamic vehemence that caused those on whom their glance fell to jump as though they had been touched with a hot poker. I had heard more of Dickey Darrell since my last visit, and was glad of the chance to observe Morrison & Daly's best "driver" at work.

The jam seemed on the very edge of breaking. After half an hour's strained expectation it seemed still on the very edge of breaking. So I sat down on a stump. Then for the first time I noticed another acquaintance, handling his peavie near the very person of the rear boss.

"Hullo," said I to myself, "that's funny. I

wonder if Jimmy Powers got even; and if so, why he is working so amicably and so near Roaring Dick."

At noon the men came ashore for dinner. I paid a quarter into the cook's private exchequer and so was fed. After the meal I approached my acquaintance of the year before.

"Hello, Powers," I greeted him, "I suppose you don't remember me?"

"Sure," he responded heartily. "Ain't you a little early this year?"

"No," I disclaimed, "this is a better sight than a birling match."

I offered him a cigar, which he immediately substituted for his corn-cob pipe. We sat at the root of a tree.

"It'll be a great sight when that jam pulls," said I.

"You bet," he replied, "but she's a teaser. Even old Tim Shearer would have a picnic to make out just where the key-logs are. We've started her three times, but she's plugged tight every trip. Likely to pull almost any time."

We discussed various topics. Finally I ventured:

"I see your old friend Darrell is rear boss."

" Yes," said Jimmy Powers, dryly.

"By the way, did you fellows ever square up on that birling match?"

"No," said Jimmy Powers; then after an instant, "Not yet."

I glanced at him to recognise the square set to the jaw that had impressed me so formidably the year before. And again his face relaxed almost quizzically as he caught sight of mine.

"Bub," said he, getting to his feet, "those little marks are on my foot yet. And just you tie into one idea: Dickey Darrell's got it coming." His face darkened with a swift anger. "God damn his soul!" he said, deliberately. It was no mere profanity. It was an imprecation, and in its very deliberation I glimpsed the flare of an undying hate.

About three o'clock that afternoon Jimmy's prediction was fulfilled. Without the slightest warning the jam "pulled." Usually certain premonitory *cracks*, certain sinkings down, groanings forward, grumblings, shruggings, and sullen, reluctant shiftings of the logs give opportunity for the men to assure their safety. This jam, after inexplicably hanging fire for a week, as inexplicably started like a sprinter almost into its full gait. The first few tiers toppled smash into the current, raising a waterspout

like that made by a dynamite explosion; the mass behind plunged forward blindly, rising and falling as the integral logs were up-ended, turned over, thrust one side, or forced bodily into the air by the mighty power playing jack-straws with them.

The rivermen, though caught unaware, reached either bank. They held their peavies across their bodies as balancing-poles, and zig-zagged ashore with a calmness and lack of haste that were in reality only an indication of the keenness with which they fore-estimated each chance. Long experience with the ways of saw-logs brought them out. They knew the correlation of these many forces just as the expert billiard-player knows instinctively the various angles of incident and reflection between his cue-ball and its mark. Consequently they avoided the centres of eruption, paused on the spots steadied for the moment, dodged moving logs, trod those not yet under way, and so arrived on solid ground. The jam itself started with every indication of meaning business, gained momentum for a hundred feet, and then plugged to a standstill. The "break" was abortive.

Now we all had leisure to notice two things. First, the movement had not been of the whole

jam, as we had at first supposed, but only of a block or section of it twenty rods or so in extent. Thus between the part that had moved and the greater bulk that had not stirred lay a hundred feet of open water in which floated a number of loose logs. The second fact was, that Dickey Darrell had fallen into that open stretch of water and was in the act of swimming toward one of the floating logs. That much we were given just time to appreciate thoroughly. Then the other section of the jam rumbled and began to break. Roaring Dick was caught between two gigantic millstones moving to crush him out of sight.

An active figure darted down the tail of the first section, out over the floating logs, seized Darrell by the coat-collar, and so burdened began desperately to scale the very face of the breaking jam.

Never was a more magnificent rescue. The logs were rolling, falling, diving against the laden man. He climbed as over a treadmill, a treadmill whose speed was constantly increasing. And when he finally gained the top, it was as the gap closed splintering beneath him and the man he had saved.

It is not in the woodsman to be demonstrative

at any time, but here was work demanding attention. Without a pause for breath or congratulation they turned to the necessity of the moment. The jam, the whole jam, was moving at last. Jimmy Powers ran ashore for his peavie. Roaring Dick, like a demon incarnate, threw himself into the work. Forty men attacked the jam at a dozen places, encouraging the movement, twisting aside the timbers that threatened to lock anew, directing pigmy-like the titanic forces into the channel of their efficiency. Roaring like wild cattle the logs swept by, at first slowly, then with the railroad rush of the curbed freshet. Men were everywhere, taking chances, like cowboys before the stampeded herd. And so, out of sight around the lower bend swept the front of the jam in a swirl of glory, the rivermen riding the great boom back of the creature they subdued, until at last, with the slackening current, the logs floated by free, cannoning with hollow sound one against the other. A half-dozen watchers, leaning statuesquely on the shafts of their peavies, watched the ordered ranks pass by.

One by one the spectators departed. At last only myself and the brown-faced young man remained. He sat on a stump, staring with

sightless eyes into vacancy. I did not disturb his thoughts.

The sun dipped. A cool breeze of evening sucked up the river. Over near the cook-camp a big fire commenced to crackle by the drying frames. At dusk the rivermen straggled in from the down-river trail.

The brown-faced young man arose and went to meet them. I saw him return in close conversation with Jimmy Powers. Before they reached us he had turned away with a gesture of farewell.

Jimmy Powers stood looking after him long after his form had disappeared, and indeed even after the sound of his wheels had died toward town. As I approached, the riverman turned to me a face from which the reckless, contained self-reliance of the woods-worker had faded. It was wide-eyed with an almost awe-stricken wonder and adoration.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked me in a hushed voice. "That's Thorpe, Harry Thorpe. And do you know what he said to me just now, *me*? He told me he wanted me to work in Camp One next winter, Thorpe's One. And he told me I was the first man he ever hired straight into One."

His breath caught with something like a sob.

I had heard of the man and of his methods. I knew he had made it a practice of recruiting for his prize camp only from the employees of his other camps, that, as Jimmy said, he never "hired straight into One." I had heard, too, of his reputation among his own and other woodsmen. But this was the first time I had ever come into personal contact with his influence. It impressed me the more in that I had come to know Jimmy Powers and his kind.

"You deserve it, every bit," said I. "I'm not going to call you a hero, because that would make you tired. What you did this afternoon showed nerve. It was a brave act. But it was a better act because you rescued your enemy, because you forgot everything but your common humanity when danger——"

I broke off. Jimmy was again looking at me with his ironically quizzical grin.

"Bub," said he, "if you're going to hang any stars of Bethlehem on my Christmas tree, just call a halt right here. I didn't rescue that scalawag because I had any Christian sentiments, nary bit. I was just naturally savin' him for the birling match next Fourther July."

II

THE FOREMAN

A man is one thing: a man *plus* his work is another, entirely different. You can learn this anywhere, but in the lumber woods best of all.

Especially is it true of the camp boss, the foreman. A firm that knows its business knows this, and so never considers merely what sort of a character a candidate may bear in town. He may drink or abstain, may exhibit bravery or cowardice, strength or weakness—it is all one to the lumbermen who employ him. In the woods his quality must appear.

So often the man most efficient and trusted in the especial environment of his work is the most disreputable outside it. The mere dignifying quality of labour raises his value to the *n*th power. In it he discovers the self-respect which, in one form or another, is absolutely necessary to the man who counts. His resolution to

succeed has back of it this necessity of self-respect, and so is invincible. A good boss gives back before nothing which will further his job.

Most people in the North Country understand this double standard; but occasionally someone, either stupid or inexperienced or unobservant, makes the mistake of concluding that the town-character and the woods-character are necessarily the same. If he acts in accordance with that erroneous idea, he gets into trouble. Take the case of Silver Jack and the walking boss of Morrison & Daly, for instance. Silver Jack imagined his first encounter with Richard Darrell in Bay City indicated the certainty of like results to his second encounter with that individual in Camp Thirty. His mistake was costly; but almost anybody could have told him better. To understand the case, you must first meet Richard Darrell.

The latter was a man about five feet six inches in height, slenderly built, yet with broad, hanging shoulders. His face was an exact triangle, beginning with a mop of red-brown hair, and ending with a pointed chin. Two level quadrilaterals served him as eyebrows, beneath which a strong hooked nose separated his round, brown, chipmunk's eyes. When he walked, he threw

his heavy shoulders slightly forward. This, in turn, projected his eager, nervous countenance. The fact that he was accustomed to hold his hands half open, with the palms square to the rear, lent him a peculiarly ready and truculent air. His name, as has been said, was Richard Darrell; but men called him Roaring Dick.

For upward of fifteen years he had been woods foreman for Morrison & Daly, the great lumber firm of the Beeson Lake district. That would make him about thirty-eight years old. He did not look it. His firm thought everything of him in spite of the fact that his reputation made it exceedingly difficult to hire men for his camps. He had the name of a "driver." But this little man, in some mysterious way of his own, could get in the logs. There was none like him. About once in three months he would suddenly appear, worn and haggard, at Beeson Lake, where he would drop into an iron bed, which the Company maintained for that especial purpose. Tim Brady, the care-taker, would bring him food at stated intervals. After four days of this, he would as suddenly disappear into the forest, again charged with the vital, restless energy which kept him on his feet fourteen hours a day until the next break down. When he

looked directly at you, this nerve-force seemed to communicate itself to you with the physical shock of an impact.

Richard Darrell usually finished banking his season's cut a month earlier than anybody else. Then he drew his pay at Beeson Lake, took the train for Bay City, and set out to have a good time. Whiskey was its main element. On his intensely nervous organisation it acted like poison. He would do the wildest things. After his money was all spent, he started up river for the log-drive, hollow-eyed, shaking. In twenty-four hours he was himself again, dominant, truculent, fixing his brown chipmunk eyes on the delinquents with the physical shock of an impact, coolly balancing beneath the imminent ruin of a jam.

Silver Jack, on the other hand, was not nervous at all, but very tall and strong, with bronze-red skin, and flaxen white hair, mustache and eyebrows. The latter peculiarity earned him his nickname. He was at all times absolutely fearless and self-reliant in regard to material conditions, but singularly unobservant and stupid when it was a question of psychology. He had been a sawyer in his early experience, but later became a bartender in Muskegon. He was in

general a good-humoured animal enough, but fond of a swagger, given to showing off, and exceedingly ugly when his passions were aroused.

His first hard work, after arriving in Bay City, was, of course, to visit the saloons. In one of these he came upon Richard Darrell. The latter was enjoying himself noisily by throwing wine-glasses at a beer advertisement. As he always paid liberally for the glasses, no one thought of objecting.

" Who's th' bucko?" inquired Silver Jack of a man near the stove.

"That's Roaring Dick Darrell, walkin' boss for M. & D.," replied the other.

Silver Jack drew his flax-white eyebrows together.

"Roaring Dick, eh? Roaring Dick? Fine name fer a bad man. I s'pose he thinks he's perticular all hell, don't he?"

"I do'no. Guess he is. He's got th' name fer it."

"Well," said Silver Jack, drawing his powerful back into a bow, "I ain't much; but I don't like noise—'specially roaring."

With the words he walked directly across the saloon to the foreman.

"My name is Silver Jack," said he, "I come

from Muskegon way. I don't like noise. Quit it."

"All right," replied Dick.

The other was astonished. Then he recovered his swagger and went on:

"They tell me you're the old he-coon of this neck of th' woods. P'r'aps you *were*. But I'm here now. Ketch on? I'm th' boss of this shebang now."

Dick smiled amiably. "All right," he repeated.

This second acquiescence nonplussed the newcomer. But he insisted on his fight.

"You're a bluff!" said he, insultingly.

"Ah! go to hell!" replied Dick with disgust.

"What's that?" shouted the stranger, towering with threatening bulk over the smaller man.

And then to his surprise Dick Darrell began to beg.

"Don't you hit me!" he cried, "I ain't done nothing to you. You let me alone! Don't you let him touch me!" he called beseechingly to the barkeeper. "I don't want to get hurt. Stop it! Let me be!"

Silver Jack took Richard Darrell by the collar and propelled him rapidly to the door. The foreman hung back like a small boy in the grasp

of a schoolmaster, whining, beseeching, squirming, appealing for help to the barkeeper and the bystanders. When finally he was energetically kicked into the gutter, he wept a little with nervous rage.

"Roaring Dick! Rats!" said Silver Jack. "Anybody can do him proper. If that's your 'knocker,' you're a gang of high bankers."

The other men merely smiled in the manner of those who know. Incidentally Silver Jack was desperately pounded by Big Dan, later in the evening, on account of that "high-banker" remark.

Richard Darrell, soon after, went into the woods with his crew, and began the tremendous struggle against the wilderness. Silver Jack and Big Dan took up the saloon business at Beeson Lake, and set themselves to gathering a clientèle which should do them credit.

The winter was a bad one for everybody. Deep snows put the job behind; frequent storms undid the work of an infinitely slow patience. When the logging roads were cut through, the ground failed to freeze because of the thick white covering that overlaid it. Darrell in his mysterious compelling fashion managed somehow. Everywhere his thin eager triangle of a face with

the brown chipmunk eyes was seen, bullying the men into titanic exertions by the mere shock of his nervous force. Over the thin crust of ice cautious loads of a few thousand feet were drawn to the banks of the river. The road-bed held. Gradually it hardened and thickened. The size of the loads increased. Finally Billy O'Brien drew up triumphantly at the rollway.

"There's a rim-racker!" he exclaimed. "Give her all she'll stand, Jimmy."

Jimmy Hall, the scaler, laid his flexible rule over the face of each log. The men gathered, interested in this record load.

"Thirteen thousand two hundred and forty," announced the scaler at last.

"Whoopee!" crowed Billy O'Brien, "that'll lay out Rollway Charley by two thousand feet!"

The men congratulated him on his victory over the other teamster, Rollway Charley. Suddenly Darrell was among them, eager, menacing, thrusting his nervous face and heavy shoulders here and there in the crowd, bullying them back to the work which they were neglecting. When his back was turned they grumbled at him savagely, threatening to disobey, resolving to quit. Some of them did quit: but none of them disobeyed.

Now the big loads were coming in regularly, and the rollways became choked with the logs dumped down on them from the sleighs. There were not enough men to roll them down to the river, nor to "deck" them there in piles. Work accumulated. The cant-hook men became discouraged. What was the use of trying? They might as well take it easy. They did take it easy. As a consequence the teamsters had often to wait two, three hours to be unloaded. They were out until long after dark, feeling their way homeward through hunger and cold.

Dick Darrell, walking boss of all the camps, did the best he could. He sent message after message to Beeson Lake demanding more men. If the rollways could be definitely cleared once, the work would lighten all along the line. Then the men would regain their content. More help was promised, but it was slow in coming. The balance hung trembling. At any moment the foreman expected the crisis, when the men, discouraged by the accumulation of work, would begin to "jump," would ask for their "time" and quit, leaving the job half finished in the woods. This catastrophe must not happen. Darrell himself worked like a demon until dark, and then, ten to one, while the other men rested,

would strike feverishly across to Camp Twenty-eight or Camp Forty, where he would consult with Morgan or Scotty Parsons until far into the night. His pale, triangular face showed the white lines of exhaustion, but his chipmunk eyes and his eager movements told of a determination stronger than any protests of a mere nature.

Now fate ordained that Silver Jack for the purposes of his enlightenment should select just this moment to drum up trade. He was, in his way, as anxious to induce the men to come out of the woods as Richard Darrell was to keep them in. Beeson Lake at this time of year was very dull. Only a few chronic loafers, without money, ornamented the saloon walls. On the other hand, at the four camps of Morrison & Daly were three hundred men each with four months' pay coming to him. In the ordinary course of events these men would not be out for sixty days yet, but Silver Jack and Big Dan perfectly well knew that it only needed the suggestion, the temptation, to arouse the spirit of restlessness. That a taste or so of whiskey will shiver the patience of men oppressed by long monotony is as A B C to the north-country saloon-keeper. Silver Jack resolved to make the rounds of the camps sure that the investment of

a few jugs of whiskey would bring down to Beeson Lake at least thirty or forty woods-wearied men.

Accordingly he donned many clothes, and drove out into the wilderness a cutter containing three jugs and some cigars in boxes. He anticipated trouble. Perhaps he would even have to lurk in the woods, awaiting his opportunity to smuggle his liquor to the men.

However, luck favoured him. At Camp Twenty-eight he was able to dodge unseen into the men's camp. When Morgan, the camp foreman, finally discovered his presence, the mischief had been done. Everybody was smoking cigars, everybody was happily conscious of a warm glow at the pit of the stomach, everybody was firmly convinced that Silver Jack was the best fellow on earth. Morgan could do nothing. An attempt to eject Silver Jack, an expostulation even, would, he knew, lose him his entire crew. The men, their heads whirling with the anticipated delights of a spree, would indignantly champion their new friend. Morgan retired grimly to the "office." There, the next morning, he silently made out the "time" of six men, who had decided to quit. He wondered what would become of the rollways.

Silver Jack, for the sake of companionship, took one of the "jumpers" in the cutter with him. He was pleased over his success, and intended now to try Camp Thirty, Darrell's headquarters. In regard to Morgan he had been somewhat uneasy, for he had never encountered that individual; but Darrell he thought he knew. The trouble at Bay City had inspired him with a great contempt for the walking boss. That is where his mistake came in.

It was very cold. The snow was up to the horses' bellies, so Silver Jack had to drive at a plunging walk. Occasionally one or the other of the two stood up and thrashed his arms about. At noon they ate sandwiches of cold fried bacon, which the frost rendered brittle as soon as it left the warmth of their inside pockets. Underfoot the runners of the cutter shrieked loudly. They saw the tracks of deer and wolves and partridge, and encountered a few jays, chickadees, and woodpeckers. Otherwise the forest seemed quite empty. By half-past two they had made nine miles, and the sun, in this high latitude, was swinging lower. Silver Jack spoke angrily to his struggling animals. The other had fallen into the silence of numbness.

They did not know that across the reaches of

the forest a man was hurrying to intercept them, a man who hastened to cope with this new complication as readily as he would have coped with the emergency of a lack of flour or the sickness of horses. They drove confidently.

Suddenly from nowhere a figure appeared in the trail before them. It stood, silent and impassive, with forward-drooping, heavy shoulders, watching the approaching cutter through inscrutable chipmunk eyes. When the strangers had approached to within a few feet of this man, the horses stopped of their own accord.

"Hello, Darrell," greeted Silver Jack, tugging at one of the stone jugs beneath the seat, "you're just the man I wanted to see."

The figure made no reply.

"Have a drink," offered the big man, finally extricating the whiskey.

"You can't take that whiskey into camp," said Darrell.

"Oh, I guess so," replied Silver Jack, easily, hoping for the peaceful solution. "There ain't enough to get anybody full. Have a taster, Darrell; it's pretty good stuff."

"I mean it," repeated Darrell. "You got to go back." He seized the horses' bits and began to lead them in the reversing circle.

"Hold on there!" cried Silver Jack. "You let them horses alone! You damn little runt! Let them alone I say!" The robe was kicked aside, and Silver Jack prepared to descend.

Richard Darrell twisted his feet out of his snow-shoe straps. "You can't take that whiskey into camp," he repeated simply.

"Now look here, Darrell," said the other in even tones, "don't you make no mistake. I ain't selling this whiskey; I'm *giving* it away. The law can't touch me. You ain't any right to say where I'll go, and, by God, I'm going where I please!"

"You got to go back with that whiskey," replied Darrell.

Silver Jack threw aside his coat, and advanced. "You get out of my way, or I'll kick you out, like I done at Bay City."

In an instant two blows were exchanged. The first marked Silver Jack's bronze-red face just to the left of his white eyebrow. The second sent Richard Darrell gasping and sobbing into the snow-bank ten feet away. He arose with the blood streaming from beneath his mustache. His eager, nervous face was white; his chipmunk eyes narrowed; his great hands, held palm backward, clutched spasmodically. With the

stealthy motion of a cat he approached his antagonist, and sprang. Silver Jack stood straight and confident, awaiting him. Three times the aggressor was knocked entirely off his feet. The fourth he hit against the cutter body, and his fingers closed on the axe which all voyagers through the forest carry as a matter of course.

"He's gettin' ugly. Come on, Hank!" cried Silver Jack.

The other man, with a long score to pay the walking boss, seized the iron starting-bar, and descended. Out from the inscrutable white forest murder breathed like a pestilential air. The two men talked about it easily, confidently.

"You ketch him on one side, and I'll come in on the other," said the man named Hank, gripping his short, heavy bar.

The forest lay behind; the forest, easily penetrable to a man in moccasins. Richard Darrell could at any moment have fled beyond the possibility of pursuit. This had become no mere question of a bar-room fisticuff, but of life and death. He had begged abjectly from the pain of a cuff on the ear; now he merely glanced over his shoulder toward the safety that lay beyond. Then, with a cry, he whirled the axe about his head and threw it directly at the second of his antagonists.

The flat of the implement struck heavily, full on the man's forehead. He fell, stunned. Immediately the other two precipitated themselves on the weapons. This time Silver Jack secured the axe, while Darrell had to content himself with the short, heavy bar. The strange duel recommenced, while the horses, mildly curious, gazed through the steam of their nostrils at their warring masters.

Overhead the ravens of the far north idled to and fro. When the three men lay still on the trampled snow, they stooped, nearer and nearer. Then they towered. One of the men had stirred.

Richard Darrell painfully cleared his eyes and dragged himself to a sitting position, sweeping the blood of his shallow wound from his forehead. He searched out the axe. With it he first smashed in the whiskey jugs. Then he wrecked the cutter, chopping it savagely until it was reduced to splinters and twisted iron. By the time this was done, his antagonists were in the throes of returning consciousness. He stood over them, dominant, menacing.

"You hit th' back trail," said he, "damn quick! Don't you let me see you 'round these diggings again."

Silver Jack, bewildered, half stunned, not understanding this little cowardly man who had permitted himself to be kicked from the saloon, rose slowly.

"You stand there!" commanded Darrell. He opened a pocket-knife, and cut the harness to bits, leaving only the necessary head-stalls intact.

"Now git!" said he. "Pike out!—fer Beeson Lake. Don't you stop at no Camp Twenty-eight!"

Appalled at the prospect of the long journey through the frozen forest, Silver Jack and his companion silently led the horses away. As they reached the bend in the trail, they looked back. The sun was just setting through the trees, throwing the illusion of them gigantic across the eye. And he stood there huge, menacing, against the light—the dominant spirit, Roaring Dick of the woods, the incarnation of Necessity, the Man defending his Work, the Foreman!

III

THE SCALER

Once Morrison & Daly, of Saginaw, but then lumbering at Beeson Lake, lent some money to a man named Crothers, taking in return a mortgage on what was known as the Crothers Tract of white pine. In due time, as Crothers did not liquidate, the firm became possessed of this tract. They hardly knew what to do with it.

The timber was situated some fifty miles from the railroad in a country that threw all sorts of difficulties across the logger's path, and had to be hauled from nine to fifteen miles to the river. Both Morrison and Daly groaned in spirit. Supplies would have to be toted in to last the entire winter, for when the snow came, communication over fifty miles of forest road would be as good as cut off. Whom could they trust among the lesser foremen of their woods force? Whom could they spare among the greater?

At this juncture they called to them Tim

Shearer, their walking boss and the greatest riverman in the State.

"You'll have to 'job' her," said Tim, promptly.

"Who would be hired at any price to go up in that country on a ten-mile haul?" demanded Daly, sceptically.

"Jest one man," replied Tim, "an' I know where to find him."

He returned with an individual at the sight of whom the partners glanced toward each other in doubt and dismay. But there seemed no help for it. A contract was drawn up in which the firm agreed to pay six dollars a thousand, merchantable scale, for all saw-logs banked at a rollway to be situated a given number of miles from the forks of Cass Branch, while on his side James Bourke, better known as the Rough Red, agreed to put in at least three and one-half million feet. After the latter had scrawled his signature he lurched from the office, softly rubbing his hairy freckled hand where the pen had touched it.

"That means a crew of wild Irishmen," said Morrison.

"And *that* means they'll just slaughter the pine," added Daly. "They'll saw high and crooked, they'll chuck the tops—who are we going to send to scale for 'em?"

Morrison sighed. "I hate to do it: there's only Fitz can make it go."

So then they called to them another of their best men, named FitzPatrick, and sent him away alone to protect the firm's interests in the depths of the wilderness.

The Rough Red was a big broad-faced man with eyes far apart and a bushy red beard. He wore a dingy mackinaw coat, a dingy black-and-white checked-flannel shirt, dingy blue trousers, tucked into high socks and lumberman's rubbers. The only spot of colour in his costume was the flaming red sash of the *voyageur* which he passed twice around his waist. When at work his little wide eyes flickered with a baleful, wicked light, his huge voice bellowed through the woods in a torrent of imprecations and commands, his splendid muscles swelled visibly even under his loose blanket-coat as he wrenched suddenly and savagely at some man's stubborn cant-hook stock. A hint of reluctance or opposition brought his fist to the mark with irresistible impact. Then he would pluck his victim from the snow, and kick him to work with a savage jest that raised a laugh from everybody—excepting the object of it.

At night he stormed back through the forest

at the head of his band, shrieking wild blasphemy at the silent night, irreverent, domineering, bold, with a certain tang of Irish goodnature that made him the beloved of Irishmen. And at the trail's end the unkempt, ribald crew swarmed their dark and dirty camp as a band of pirates a galleon.

In the work was little system, but much efficacy. The men gambled, drank, fought, without a word of protest from their leader. With an ordinary crew such performances would have meant slight accomplishment, but these wild Irishmen, with their bloodshot eyes, their ready jests, their equally ready fists, plunged into the business of banking logs with all the abandon of a carouse—and the work was done.

Law in that wilderness was not, saving that which the Rough Red chose to administer. Except in one instance, penalty more severe than a beating there was none, for the men could not equal their leader in breaking the greater and lesser laws of morality. The one instance was that of young Barney Mallan, who, while drunk, mishandled a horse so severely as to lame it. Him the Rough Red called to formal account.

"Don't ye know that horses can't be had?" he

demanded, singularly enough without an oath. "Come here."

The man approached. With a single powerful blow of a starting-bar the Rough Red broke one of the bones of his tibia.

"Try th' lameness yerself," said the Rough Red, grimly. He glared about through the dimness at his silent men, then stalked through the door into the cook-camp. Had he killed Barney Mallan outright, it would have been the same. No one in the towns would have been a word the wiser.

On Thanksgiving Day the entire place went on a prolonged drunk. The Rough Red distinguished himself by rolling the round stove through the door into the snow. He was badly burned in accomplishing this delicate jest, but minded the smart no more then he did the admiring cheers of his maudlin but emulative mates. FitzPatrick extinguished a dozen little fires that the coals had started, shifted the intoxicated Mallan's leg out of the danger of someone's falling on it, and departed from that roaring hell-hole to the fringe of the solemn forest. And this brings us to FitzPatrick.

FitzPatrick was a tall, slow man, with a face built square. The lines of his brows, his mouth,

and his jaw ran straight across; those of his temples, cheeks, and nose straight up and down. His eye was very quiet and his speech rare. When he did talk, it was with deliberation. For days, sometimes, he would ejaculate nothing but monosyllables, looking steadily on the things about him.

He had walked in ahead of the tote-team late one evening in the autumn, after the Rough Red and his devils had been at work a fortnight. The camp consisted quite simply of three buildings, which might have been identified as a cook-camp, a sleeping-camp, and a stable. FitzPatrick entered the sleeping-camp, stood his slender scaling-rule in the corner, and peered about him through the dusk of a single lamp.

He saw a round stove in the centre, a littered and dirty floor, bunks filled with horrible straw and worse blankets jumbled here and there, old and dirty clothes drying fetidly. He saw an unkempt row of hard-faced men along the deacon-seat, reckless in bearing, with the light of the dare-devil in their eyes.

"Where is the boss?" asked FitzPatrick, steadily.

The Rough Red lurched his huge form toward the intruder.

"I am your scaler," explained the latter. "Where is the office?"

"You can have the bunk beyand," indicated the Rough Red, surlily.

"You have no office then?"

"What's good enough fer th' men is good enough for a boss; and what's good enough fer th' boss is good enough fer any blank blanked scaler."

"It is not good enough for this one," replied FitzPatrick, calmly. "I have no notion of sleepin' and workin' in no such noise an' dirt. I need an office to keep me books and th' van. Not a log do I scale for ye, Jimmy Bourke, till you give me a fit place to tally in."

And so it came about, though the struggle lasted three days. The Rough Red stormed restlessly between the woods and the camp, delivering tremendous broadsides of oaths and threats. FitzPatrick sat absolutely imperturbable on the deacon-seat, looking straight in front of him, his legs stretched comfortably aslant, one hand supporting the elbow of the other, which in turn held his short brier pipe.

"Good-mornin' to ye, Jimmy Bourke," said he each morning, and after that uttered no word until the evening, when it was, "Good-night to

ye, Jimmy Bourke," with a final *rap, rap, rap* of his pipe.

The cook, a thin-faced, sly man, with a penchant for the *Police Gazette*, secretly admired him.

"Luk' out for th' Rough Red; he'll do ye!" he would whisper hoarsely when he passed the silent scaler.

But in the three days the Rough Red put his men to work on a little cabin. FitzPatrick at once took his scaling-rule from the corner and set out into the forest.

His business was, by measuring the diameter of each log, to ascertain and tabulate the number of board feet put in by the contractor. On the basis of his single report James Bourke would be paid for the season's work. Inevitably he at once became James Bourke's natural enemy, and so of every man in the crew with the possible exception of the cook.

Suppose you log a knoll which your eye tells you must grow at least a half-million; suppose you work conscientiously for twelve days; suppose your average has always been between forty and fifty thousand a day. And then suppose the scaler's sheets credit you with only a little over the four hundred thousand! What would

you think of it? Would you not be inclined to suspect that the scaler had cheated you in favour of his master? that you had been compelled by false figures to work a day or so for nothing?

FitzPatrick scaled honestly, for he was a just man, but exactitude and optimism of estimate never have approximated, and they did not in this case. The Rough Red grumbled, accused, swore, threatened. FitzPatrick smoked "Peerless," and said nothing. Still it was not pleasant for him, alone there in the dark wilderness fifty miles from the nearest settlement, without a human being with whom to exchange a friendly word.

The two men early came to a clash over the methods of cutting. The Rough Red and his crew cut anywhere, everywhere, anyhow. The easiest way was theirs. Small timber they skipped, large timber they sawed high, tops they left rather than trim them into logs. FitzPatrick would not have the pine "slaughtered."

"Ye'll bend your backs a little, Jimmy Bourke," said he, "and cut th' stumps lower to th' ground. There's a bunch of shingles at least in every stump ye've left. And you must saw straighter. And th' contract calls for eight

inches and over; mind ye that. Don't go to skippin' th' little ones because they won't scale ye high. 'Tis in the contract so. And I won't have th' tops left. There's many a good log in them, an' ye trim them fair and clean."

"Go to hell, you—" shouted the Rough Red. "Where th' blazes did ye learn so much of loggin'? I log th' way me father logged, an' I'm not to be taught by a high-banker from th' Muskegon!"

Never would he acknowledge the wrong nor promise the improvement, but both were there, and both he and FitzPatrick knew it. The Rough Red chafed frightfully, but in a way his hands were tied. He could do nothing without the report; and it was too far out to send for another scaler, even if Daly would have given him one.

Finally in looking over a skidway he noticed that one log had not been blue-pencilled across the end. That meant that it had not been scaled; and that in turn meant that he, the Rough Red, would not be paid for his labour in cutting and banking it. At once he began to bellow through the woods.

"Hey! FitzPatrick! Come here, you blank-blanked-blank of a blank! Come here!"

The scaler swung leisurely down the travoy trail and fronted the other with level eyes.

"Well?" said he.

"Why ain't that log marked?"

"I culled it."

"Ain't it sound and good? Is there a mark on it? A streak of punk or rot? Ain't it good timber? What the hell's th' matter with it? You tried to do me out of that, you damn skunk."

A log is culled, or thrown out, when, for any reason, it will not make good timber.

"I'll tell you, Jimmy Bourke," replied FitzPatrick, calmly, "th' stick is sound and good, or was before your murderin' crew got hold of it, but if ye'll take a squint at the butt of it ye'll see that your gang has sawed her on a six-inch slant. They've wasted a good foot of th' log. I spoke of that afore; an' now I give ye warnin' that I cull every log, big or little, punk or sound, that ain't sawed square and true across th' butt."

"Th' log is sound and good, an' ye'll scale it, or I'll know th' reason why!"

"I will not," replied FitzPatrick.

The following day he culled a log in another and distant skidway whose butt showed a slant of a good six inches. The day following he

culled another of the same sort on still another skidway. He examined it closely, then sought the Rough Red.

"It is useless, Jimmy Bourke," said he, "to be hauling of the same poor log from skidway to skidway. You can shift her to every travoy trail in th' Crother tract, but it will do ye little good. I'll cull it wherever I find it, and never will ye get th' scale of that log."

The Rough Red raised his hand, then dropped it again; whirled away with a curse; whirled back with another, and spat out:

"By God, FitzPatrick, ye go too far! Ye've hounded me and harried me through th' woods all th' year! By God, 'tis a good stick, an' ye shall scale it!"

"Yo' and yore Old Fellows is robbers alike!" cried one of the men.

FitzPatrick turned on his heel and resumed his work. The men ceased theirs and began to talk.

That night was Christmas Eve. After supper the Rough Red went directly from the cook-camp to the men's camp. FitzPatrick, sitting lonely in the little office, heard the sounds of debauch rising steadily like mysterious storm winds in distant pines. He shrugged his shoulders, and tallied his day's scaling, and turned into his bunk

wearily, for of holidays there are none in the woods, save Sunday. About midnight someone came in. FitzPatrick, roused from his sleep by aimless blunderings, struck a light, and saw the cook looking uncertainly toward him through blood-clotted lashes. The man was partly drunk, partly hurt, but more frightened.

"They's too big fer me, too big fer me!" he repeated, thickly.

FitzPatrick kicked aside the blankets and set foot on the floor.

"Le' me stay," pleaded the cook, "I won't bother you; I won't even make a noise. I'm skeered!"

"Course you can stay," replied the scaler. "Come here."

He washed the man's forehead, and bound up the cut with surgeon's plaster from the van. The man fell silent, looking at him in wonderment for such kindness.

Four hours later, dimly, through the mist of his broken sleep, FitzPatrick heard the crew depart for the woods in the early dawn. On the crest of some higher waves of consciousness were borne to him drunken shouts, maudlin blasphemies. After a time he arose and demanded breakfast.

The cook, pale and nervous, served him. The man was excited, irresolute, eager to speak. Finally he dropped down on the bench opposite FitzPatrick, and began.

"Fitz," said he, "don't go in th' woods to-day. The men is fair wild wid th' drink, and th' Rough Red is beside hi'self. Las' night I heerd them. They are goin' to skid the butt log again, and they swear that if you cull it again, they will kill you. They mean it. That's all why they wint to th' woods this day."

FitzPatrick swallowed his coffee in silence. In silence he arose and slipped on his mackinaw blanket coat. In silence he thrust his beechwood tablets into his pocket, and picked his pliable scaler's rule from the corner.

"Where are ye goin'?" asked the cook, anxiously.

"I'm goin' to do th' work they pay me to do," answered FitzPatrick.

He took his way down the trail, his face set straight before him, the smoke of his breath streaming behind. The first skidway he scaled with care, laying his rule flat across the face of each log, entering the figures on his many-leaved tablets of beech, marking the timbers swiftly with his blue crayon.

The woods were empty. No ring of the axe, no shout of the driver, no fall of the tree broke the silence. FitzPatrick comprehended. He knew that at the next skidway the men were gathered, waiting to see what he would do; gathered openly at last in that final hostility which had been maturing all winter. He knew, besides, that most of them were partly drunk and wholly reckless, and that he was alone. Nevertheless, after finishing conscientiously skidway number one, he moved on to skidway number two.

There, as he had expected, the men were waiting in ominous silence, their eyes red with debauch and hate. FitzPatrick paid them no heed, but set about his business.

Methodically, deliberately, he did the work. Then, when the last pencil-mark had been made, and the tablets had been closed with a snap of finality, the Rough Red stepped forward.

"Ye have finished with this skidway?" asked the foreman in soft cat-tones.

"I have," answered FitzPatrick, briefly.

"Yo' have forgot to scale one stick."

"No."

"There is a stick still not marked."

"I culled it."

"Why?"

"It was not sawed straight."

FitzPatrick threw his head back proudly, answering his man at ease, as an accomplished swordsman. The Rough Red shifted his feet, almost awed in spite of himself. One after another the men dropped their eyes and stood ill at ease. The scaler turned away; his heel caught a root; he stumbled; instantly the pack was on him, for the power of his eye was broken.

Mad with rage they kicked and beat and tore at FitzPatrick's huddled form long after consciousness had left it. Then an owl hooted from the shadow of the wood, or a puff of wind swept by, or a fox barked, or some other little thing happened, so that in blind unreasoning panic they fled. The place was deserted, save for the dark figure against the red-and-white snow.

FitzPatrick regained his wits in pain, and so knew he was still on earth. Every movement cost him a moan, and some agency outside himself inflicted added torture. After a long time he knew it was the cook, who was kindly kneading his limbs and knuckling his hair. The man proved to be in a maze of wonderment over his patient's tenacity of life.

"I watched ye," he murmured soothingly, "I

did not dare interfere. But I kem to yo' 's soon as I could. See, here's a fire that I built for ye, and some tea. Take a little. And no bones broke! True for ye, ye're a hearty man, and strong with th' big muscles on ye fit to fight th' Rough Red man to man. Get th' use of yere legs, darlint, an' I'll tak' ye to camp, for its fair drunk they are by now. Sure an' I tole ye they'd kill ye?"

"But they didn't," muttered FitzPatrick with a gleam of humour.

"Sure 'twas not their fault—nor yer own!"

Hours later, as it seemed, they moved slowly in the direction of camp. The cold had stiffened FitzPatrick's cuts and bruises. Every step shot a red wave of torture through his arteries to his brain. They came in sight of camp. It was silent. Both knew that the men had drunk themselves into a stupor.

"I'd like t' kill th' whole lay-out as she sleeps," snarled the cook, shaking his fist.

"So would I," replied FitzPatrick.

Then as they looked, a thin wreath of smoke curled from under the open doorway and spread lazily in the frosty air. Another followed; another; still another. The cabin was afire.

"They've kicked over th' stove again," said

FitzPatrick, seating himself on a stump. His eyes blazed with wrath and bitterness.

"What yo' goin' to do?" asked the cook.

"Sit here," replied FitzPatrick, grimly.

The cook started forward.

"Stop!" shouted the scaler, fiercely; "if you move a step, I'll break your back!"

The cook stared at him through saucer eyes.

"But they'd be burnt alive!" he objected, wildly.

"They ought to be," snarled the scaler; "it ain't their fault I'm here to help them. 'Tis their own deed that I'm now lyin' beyant there in th' forest, unable to help myself. Do you understand? I'm yet out there in th' woods!"

"Ah, wirra, wirra!" wailed the cook, wringing his hands. "Th' poor lads!" He began to weep.

FitzPatrick stared straight in front of him for a moment. Then he struck his forehead, and with wonderful agility, considering the injuries he had but just received, tore down the hill in the direction of the smouldering cabin. The cook followed him joyfully. Together they put out the fire. The men snored like beasts, undisturbed by all the tumult.

" 'Tis th' soft heart ye have after all, Fitz,"

said the cook, delightedly, as the two washed their hands in preparation for a lunch. "Ye could not bear t' see th' lads burn."

FitzPatrick glowered at him for an instant from beneath his square brows.

"They can go to hell for all of me," he answered, finally, "but my people want these logs put in this winter, an' there's nobody else to put them in."

IV

THE RIVER-BOSS

"Obey orders if you break owners" is a good rule, but a really efficient river-boss knows a better. It runs, "Get the logs out. Get them out peaceably if you can, but *get them out.*" He does not need a field-telephone to headquarters to teach him how to live up to the spirit of this rule. That might involve headquarters.

Jimmy was such a river-boss. Therefore when Mr. Daly, of the firm of Morrison & Daly, unexpectedly contracted to deliver five million feet of logs on a certain date, and the logs an impossible number of miles up river, he called in Jimmy.

Jimmy was a small man, changeless as the Egyptian sphinx. A number of years ago a French comic journal published a series of sketches supposed to represent the Shah of Persia influenced by various emotions. Under each was an appropriate caption, such as Surprise,

Grief, Anger, or Astonishment. The portraits were identically alike, and uniformly impassive.

Well, that was Jimmy. He looked always the same. His hair, thick and black, grew low on his forehead; his beard, thick and black, mounted over the ridge of his cheek-bones; and his eyebrows, thick and black, extended in an uninterrupted straight line from one temple to the other. Whatever his small, compact, muscular body might be doing, the mask of his black and white imperturbability remained always unchanged. Generally he sat clasping one knee, staring directly in front of him, and puffing regularly on a "meerschaum" pipe he had earned by saving the tags of Spearhead tobacco. Whatever you said to him sank without splash into this almost primal calm and was lost to your view forever. Perhaps after a time he might do something about it, but always without explanation, calmly, with the lofty inevitability of fate. In fact, he never explained himself, even to his employers.

Daly swung his bulk back and forth in the office chair. Jimmy sat bolt upright, his black hat pendant between his knees.

"I want you to take charge of the driving crew, Jimmy," said the big man; "I want you to drive those logs down to our booms as fast as

you can. I give you about twenty days. It ought to be done in that. Sanders will keep time for you, and Merrill will cook. You can get a pretty good crew from the East Branch, where the drive is just over."

When Daly had quite finished his remarks, Jimmy got up and went out without a word. Two days later he and sixty men were breaking rollways forty-five miles up-stream.

Jimmy knew as well as Daly that the latter had given him a hard task. Twenty days was too brief a time. However, that was none of his business.

The logs, during the winter, had been piled in the bed of the stream. They extended over three miles of rollways. Jimmy and his crew began at the down-stream end to tumble the big piles into the current. Sometimes only two or three logs would rattle down; at others the whole deck would bulge outward, hover for a moment, and roar into the stream like grain from an elevator. Shortly the narrows below the rollways jammed. Twelve men were detailed as the jam crew. Their business was to keep the stream free in order that the constantly increasing supply from the rollways might not fill up the river. It was not an easy business, nor a very safe. As

the "jam" strung out over more and more of the river, the jam crew was constantly recruited from the men on the rollways. Thus some of the logs, a very few, the luckiest, drifted into the dam pond at Grand Rapids within a few days; the bulk jammed and broke and jammed again at a point a few miles below the rollways, while a large proportion stranded, plugged, caught, and tangled at the very rollways themselves.

Jimmy had permitted himself two days in which to "break out" the rollways. It was done in two. Then the "rear" was started. Men in the rear crew had to see that every last log got into the current. When a jam broke, the middle of it shot down-stream in a most spectacular fashion, but along the banks "winged out" most distressingly. Sometimes the heavy sticks of timber had been forced right out on the dry land. The rear crew lifted them back. When an obstinate log grounded, they jumped cheerfully into the water—with the rotten ice swirling around them—and pried the thing off bottom. Between times they stood upright on single, unstable logs and pushed mightily with poles, while the ice-water sucked in and out of their spiked river shoes.

As for the compensations, naturally there was

a good deal of rivalry between the men on the right and left banks of the river as to which "wing" should advance the fastest; and one experiences a certain physical thrill in venturing under thirty feet of jammed logs for the sole purpose of teasing the whole mass to cascade down on one, or of shooting a rapid while standing upright on a single timber. I believe, too, it is considered the height of glory to belong to a rear crew. Still, the water is cold and the hours long, and you have to sleep in a tent.

It can readily be seen that the progress of the "rear" measures the progress of the drive. Some few logs in the "jam" may run fifty miles a day —and often do—but if the sacking has gone slowly at the rear, the drive may not have gained more than a thousand yards. Therefore Jimmy stayed at the rear.

Jimmy was a mighty good riverman. Of course he had nerve, and could do anything with a log and a peavy, and would fight at the drop of a hat—any "bully boy" would qualify there—but also he had judgment. He knew how to use the water, how to recognise the key log of jams, where to place his men—in short, he could get out the logs. Now Jimmy also knew the river from one end to the other, so he had arranged in

his mind a sort of schedule for the twenty days. Forty-eight hours for the rollways; a day and a half to the upper rapids; three days into the dam pond; one day to sluice the drive through the Grand Rapids dam; three days for the Crossing; and so on. If everything went well, he could do it, but there must be no hitches in the programme.

Even from this imperfect fragment of the schedule the inexperienced might imagine Jimmy had allowed an altogether disproportionate time to cover the mile or so from the rapids to the dam pond. As it turned, however, he found he had not allowed enough, for at this point the river was peculiar and very trying.

The backwater of the dam extended up-stream a half mile; then occurred a rise of four feet, down the slope of which the water whirled and tumbled, only to spread out over a broad fan of gravel shallows. These shallows did the business. When the logs had bumped through the tribulations of the rapids, they seemed to insist obstinately on resting in the shallows, like a lot of wearied cattle. The rear crew had to wade in. They heaved and pried and pushed industriously, and at the end of it had the satisfaction of seeing a single log slide reluctantly into the

current. Sometimes a dozen of them would clamp their peavies on either side, and by sheer brute force carry the stick to deep water. When you reflect that there were some twenty thousand pieces in the drive, and that a good fifty per cent. of them balked below the rapids, you can see that a rear crew of thirty men had its work cut out for it. Jimmy's three days were three-fourths gone, and his job not more than a third finished. McGann, the sluice boss, did a little figuring.

"She'll hang over thim twinty days," he confided to Jimmy. "Shure!"

Jimmy replied not a word, but puffed piston-like smoke from his pipe. McGann shrugged in Celtic despair.

But the little man had been figuring, too, and his arrangements were more elaborate and more nearly completed than McGann suspected. That very morning he sauntered leisurely out over the rear logs, his hands in his pockets. Every once in a while he stopped to utter a few low-voiced words to one or another of the men. The person addressed first looked extremely astonished; then shouldered his peavy and started for camp, leaving the diminished rear a prey to curiosity. Soon the word went about. "Day and night

work," they whispered, though it was a little difficult to see the difference in ultimate effectiveness between a half crew working all the time and a whole crew working half the time.

About now Daly began to worry. He took the train to Grand Rapids, anxiety written deep in his brows. When he saw the little inadequate crew pecking in a futile fashion at the logs winged out over the shallows, he swore fervidly and sought Jimmy.

Jimmy appeared calm.

"We'll get them out all right, Mr. Daly," said he.

"Get them out!" growled Daly. "Sure! But when? We ain't *got* all the summer this season. Those logs have got to hit our booms in fourteen days or they're no *good* to us!"

"You'll have 'em," assured Jimmy.

Such talk made Daly tired, and he said so.

"Why, it'll take you a week to get her over those confounded shallows," he concluded. "You got to get more men, Jimmy."

"I've tried," answered the boss. "They ain't no more men to be had."

"Suffering Moses!" groaned the owner. "It means the loss of a fifty-thousand-dollar contract to me. You needn't tell *me!* I've been on

the river all my life. I *know* you can't get them off inside of a week."

"I'll have 'em off to-morrow morning, but it may cost a little something," asserted Jimmy, calmly.

Daly took one look at the mass of logs, and the fifteen men pulling out an average of one a minute. Then he returned in disgust to the city, where he began to adjust his ideas to a loss on his contract.

At sundown the rear crew quit work, and swarmed to the encampment of white tents on the river-bank. There they hung wet clothes over a big skeleton framework built around a monster fire, and ate a dozen eggs apiece as a side dish to supper, and smoked pipes of strong "Peerless" tobacco, and swapped yarns, and sang songs, and asked questions. To the latter they received no satisfactory replies. The crew that had been laid off knew nothing. It appeared they were to go to work after supper. After supper, however, Jimmy told them to turn in and get a little more sleep. They did turn in, and speedily forgot to puzzle.

At midnight, however, Jimmy entered the big tent quietly with a lantern, touching each of the fresh men on the shoulder. They arose without

comment, and followed him outside. There they were given tools. Then the little band defiled silently down river under the stars.

Jimmy led them, his hands deep in his pockets, puffing white steam-clouds at regular intervals from his "meerschaum" pipe. After twenty minutes they struck the Water Works, then the board-walk of Canal Street. The word passed back for silence. Near the Oriole Factory their leader suddenly dodged in behind the piles of sawed lumber, motioning them to haste. A moment later a fat and dignified officer passed, swinging his club. After the policeman had gone, Jimmy again took up his march at the head of fifteen men, now thoroughly aroused to the fact that something unusual was afoot. Soon a faint roar lifted the night silence. They crossed a street, and a moment after stood at one end of the power-dam.

The long smooth water shot over, like fluid steel, silent and inevitable, mirroring distorted flashes of light that were the stars. Below, it broke in white turmoil, shouting defiance at the calm velvet rush above. Ten seconds later the current was broken. A man, his heels caught against the combing, up to his knees in water, was braced back at the exact angle to withstand

the rush. Two other men passed down to him a short heavy timber. A third, plunging his arms and shoulders into the liquid, nailed it home with heavy, inaudible strokes. As though by magic a second timber braced the first, bolted through sockets already cut for it. The workers moved on eight feet, then another eight, then another. More men entered the water. A row of heavy, slanted supports grew out from the shoulder of the dam, dividing the waters into long, arrow-shaped furrows of light. At half-past twelve Tom Clute was swept over the dam into the eddy. He swam ashore. Purdy took his place.

When the supports had reached out over half of the river's span, and the water was dotted with the shoulders of men gracefully slanted against the current, Jimmy gave orders to begin placing the flash-boards. Heavy planks were at once slid across the supports, where the weight of the racing water at once clamped them fast. Spikes held the top board beyond the possibility of a wrench loose. The smooth, quiet river, interrupted at last, murmured and snarled and eddied back, only to rush with increased vehemence around the end of the rapidly growing obstruction.

The policeman, passing back and forth on

Canal Street, heard no sound of the labour going on. If he had been an observant policeman, he would have noted an ever-changing tone in the volume of sound roaring up from the eddy below the dam. After a time even he remarked on a certain obvious phenomenon.

"Sure!" said he; "now, that's funny!"

He listened a moment, then passed on. The vagaries of the river were, after all, nothing to him. He belonged on Canal Street, east side; and Canal Street, east side, seemed peaceful.

The river had fallen absolutely silent. The last of Jimmy's flash-boards was in place. Back in the sleeping town the clock in Pierce's Tower struck two.

Jimmy and his men, having thus raised the level of the dam a good three feet, emerged dripping from the west-side canal, and cheerfully took their way northward to where, in the chilly dawn, their companions were sleeping the sleep of the just. As they passed the riffles they paused. A heavy grumbling issued from the logs jammed there, a grumbling brutish and sullen, as though the reluctant animals were beginning to stir. The water had already backed up from the raised dam.

Of course the affair, from a river-driver's

standpoint, at once became exceedingly simple. The slumbering fifteen were aroused to astounded drowsiness. By three, just as the dawn was beginning to differentiate the east from the west, the regular *clank, clank, clink* of the peavies proclaimed that due advantage of the high water was being seized. From then until six was a matter of three hours more. A great deal can be accomplished in three hours with flood-water. The last little jam "pulled" just about the time the first citizen of the west side discovered that his cellar was full of water. When that startled freeman opened the front door to see what was up, he uttered a tremendous ejaculation; and so, shortly, came to the construction of a raft.

Well, the papers got out an extra edition with scare-heads about "Outrages" and "High-handed Lawlessness!" and factory owners by the canals raised up their voices in bitterness over flooded fire-rooms; and property owners of perishable cellar goods howled about damage suits; and the ordinary citizen took to bailing out the hollow places of his domain. Toward nine o'clock, after the first excitement had died, and the flash-boards had been indignantly yanked from their illegal places, a squadron of police

went out to hunt up the malefactor. The latter they discovered on a boom-pole directing the sluicing. From this position he declined to stir. One fat policeman ventured a toppling yard or so on the floating timber, threw his hands aloft in loss of equilibrium, and with a mighty effort regained the shore, where he sat down, panting. To the appeals of the squad to come and be arrested, Jimmy paid not the slightest heed. He puffed periodically on his "meerschaum" pipe, and directed the sluicing. Through the twenty-foot gate about a million feet an hour passed. Thus it happened that a little after noon Jimmy came peaceably ashore and gave himself up.

"You won't have no more trouble below," he observed to McGann, his lieutenant, watching reflectively the last logs shoot through the gate. "Just tie right into her and keep her hustling." Then he refilled his pipe, lit it, and approached the expectant squad.

At the station-house he was interviewed by reporters. That is, they asked questions. To only one of them did they elicit a reply.

"Didn't you know you were breaking the law?" inquired the *Eagle* man. "Didn't you know you'd be arrested?"

"Sure!" replied Jimmy, with obvious contempt.

The next morning the court-room was crowded. Jimmy pleaded guilty, and was fined five hundred dollars or ninety days in jail. To the surprise of everybody he fished out a tremendous roll and paid the fine. The spectators considered it remarkable that a river-boss should carry such an amount. They had not been present at the interview between Jimmy and his principal the night before.

The latter stood near the door as the little man came out.

"Jimmy," said Mr. Daly, distinctly, so that everyone could hear, "I am extremely sorry to see you in this trouble; but perhaps it may prove a lesson to you. Next time you must understand that you are not supposed to exceed your instructions."

Thus did the wily Daly publicly disclaim his liability.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy, meekly. "Did you get the logs in time, Mr. Daly?"

They looked at each other steadily. Then, for the first and only time, the black and white mask of Jimmy's inscrutability melted away. In his left eye appeared a faint glimmer. Then the left eyelid slowly descended.

V

THE FIFTH WAY

The prophet confessed four things as beyond his understanding—the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon the rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid—but we of modern times must add a fifth, and that is the way of justice. For often a blunderer caught red-handed escapes with slight punishment, while the clever man who transgresses, yet conceals his transgression craftily, pays at the end of a devious sequence with his life. Of this fashion was the death of Regis Brugiere.

It happened that in the fall of the year two strangers came to Ste. Jeanne for the purpose of shooting grouse, and Regis Brugiere hired himself to them as guide. His duties were not many. He had simply to drive them from one hardwood belt to another. But in his leisure he often followed them about, and so fell in love with Jim.

Jim was a black-and-white setter dog. Regis Brugiere watched him as he trotted carefully through the woods, his four legs working like pistons, his head high, his soft, intelligent eyes spying for the likely cover. Then when he caught a faint whiff of the game, he would stop short, and look around, and wag his tail. Not one step would he take toward assuring his point until the man had struggled through the thicket to his side. Thus his master obtained many shots at birds flushing wild before the dog which otherwise he would not have had.

But when the bird lay well, then Jim would tread carefully forward as though on eggs, until, his nostrils filled with the warm body-scent, he stood rigid, a living statue of beauty. A moment of breathless excitement ensued. With a burst of sound the bird roared away. There followed the quick crack of the fowling-piece, a cloud of feathers in the air, a long slanting fall. Jim looked up, eager but self-controlled.

"Fetch, Jim," said the man.

At once the dog bounded away, to return after a moment in the pride of an army with banners, carrying the grouse daintily between his jaws.

Or the shot failed. Jim waited until he heard the click of the gun as its breech closed after re-

loading, then moved forward with well-bred restraint to sniff long and inquiringly where the bird had been.

These things Regis Brugiere saw, following the hunt through the thickets, so that he broke the tenth commandment and coveted Jim with a great love. He worshipped the dog's aloof dignity, his gentlemanly demeanour of unhasting grace in the woods, his well-bred far-away gaze as he sat on his haunches staring into the distance.

So Regis Brugiere stole Jim, the black-and-white setter, and concealed him well. To him it was a little thing to do. He did not know Jim's value, for in the north country a dog is a dog. After the strangers had gone, bewailing their loss, Regis Brugiere loaded a toboggan with supplies and traps and set out into the northwest on his annual trapping excursion. He took with him Jim, by now entirely accustomed to his new master.

The two journeyed far through the forest, over many rivers and muskegs, through many swamps and ranges of hills. Regis Brugiere drew the toboggan after him. The task should have been Jim's, but to the trapper that would have seemed like harnessing Ignace St. Cloud,

the seigneur of Ste. Jeanne, to an apple-cart. So Jim ranged at large in diagonals having a good time, while the man enjoyed himself by watching the animal. In due course they came to a glade through which ran a soggy, choked, little spring-creek. Here Regis Brugiere kicked off his snow-shoes with an air of finality. Here he erected a cabin, and established himself and Jim.

Over a circumference of forty miles then he set his traps, for the beaver, the mink, the fox, the fisher, the muskrat, and the other fur-bearing animals of the north. At regular intervals he visited these traps one after the other, crunching swiftly along on his snow-shoes. Jim always accompanied him. When the snow was deep, he wallowed painfully after in the tracks made by Regis Brugiere. When it was not so deep, he looked for grouse or ptarmigan, investigated many strange things, or ran at large over the frozen surfaces of the little lakes.

At the trapping-places Jim had to stay behind. The man left with him his capote and snow-shoes, which Jim imagined himself to be guarding faithfully. Thus he was satisfied.

Then on the return journey the two had fun. Regis Brugiere liked to pick Jim up and throw

him bodily into the deepest snow. Jim liked to have him do so, and would disappear with an ecstatic yelp. In a moment he would burst out of the drift and would dance about on the tips of his toes growling fiercely in mock deprecation of a repetition for which he hoped. These were the only occasions in which Jim relaxed his solemnity. At all other times his liquid brown eyes were mournful with the tempered, delicious sorrow of affection.

In the woods Jim acquired bad habits. He reverted to the original dog. Finding that Regis Brugiere paid little attention to the grouse so carefully pointed, Jim resolved to hunt on his own account. At first his conscience hurt him so that the act amounted to sin. But afterward the delighted applause of his new master reassured him. He crouched, he trailed, he flushed, he chased, he broke all the commandments of a sporting-dog's morality. In this was demoralisation, but also great profit. For Jim came to be an adept at surprising game in the snow. His point now became exactly what it used to be in the primordial dog—a pause of preparation before the spring. Jim was beautifully independent. Except in the matter of delicacies, he supported himself.

But one thing he knew not, and that was the deer. To him they were as horses or sheep. He could not understand, nor did he care greatly, why they should flee so suddenly when he appeared. So Regis Brugiere tried to teach him, but vainly. Thus it happened that often Jim had to be left at home, for to a solitary trapper the deer is a necessity. There is in him food and clothing.

At such times Regis Brugiere was accustomed to pile high the fireplace with wood in order that his friend might be comfortable during his absence. Then he would leave the dog disconsolate. On the first of these occasions Jim effected an escape, and rejoined his master at a distance with every symptom of delight. Regis Brugiere, returning disgusted, found the cabin-door sprawled wide: Jim had learned to pull it toward him with his teeth. Shortly the trapper was forced to make a latch so that the dog could not pull it ajar by the strength of his jaws and legs. Perhaps it is well here to explain that ordinarily such a cabin-door merely jams shut against the spring of a wand of hickory.

Now mark you this: If Regis Brugiere had not coveted and stolen the dog Jim, he would not have been forced to construct the latch; without

the latch, he could easily have pushed open the door by leaning against it; if he could have pushed open the door, all would have been well with both himself and Jim. And in this we admire the wonder of the fifth way—the way of justice by which a man's life is bartered for a fault.

One morning in the midwinter, when it was very cold with seventy degrees of frost, Regis Brugiere resolved to hunt the deer. As usual, he filled the fireplace, spread a robe for Jim's accommodation, thrust the latch-string through the small hole bored for that purpose, and set out in the forest. When he reached the swamp edge, he removed his snow-shoes and began carefully to pick his way along the fallen tops. Mounting on a snow-covered root, he thrust his right foot down into an unsuspected crevice, stumbled, and fell forward on his face.

When the blur of pain had cleared away, and he was able to take stock of what had happened, Regis Brugiere found that he had snapped the bones of his leg short off below the knee.

The first part of his journey home to the cabin was one of profanity; the second of prayer; the third of grim silence. In the first he lost his rifle; in the second his courage; in the third his

knowledge of what was about him. Like a crippled rabbit he dragged himself over the snow, a single black spot against the whiteness. The dark forest-trees gathered curiously about his wavering consciousness to look down on him in aloof compassion. And over him, invisible, palpable, hovered the dreadful north-country cold, waiting to stoop.

Regis Brugiere, by the grace of a woodsman's perseverance and the instinct of a wild creature, gained at last the clearing in which his cabin stood. Behind him wavered a long, deep-gouged furrow-trail, pitiful attest of suffering. His strength was water, but he was home. After a long time he reached the door, and rested. The incident was cruel, but it was only one of many in a cruel way of life.

The twilight was coming down with thronging mysterious voices. Among them clamoured fiercely the voice of the cold. Regis Brugiere felt its breath on his heart, and, in alarm, broke through the apathy of his condition. It was time to recall his forces, to enter where could be found provisions and warmth. Painfully he turned on his right side and prepared to reach the latch-string. His first movement brought him an agony to be endured only with teeth and

eyes closed, only by summoning to the minute task of thrusting his hand upward along the rough door all the forces of his being down to the last shred of vitality. At once the indomitable spirit of the woods-runner answered the call. Regis Brugiere concentrated his will on a pinpoint. Like a sprinter his volition was fixed on a goal, beyond which lay collapse.

Inch by inch the hand kept on, blindly groping. It reached the latch-string; passed it by.

Then, like a flame before it expires, the spirit of Regis Brugiere blazed out. With strange contortions of the body and writhings of the face his form came upright, the arm still reaching. So it swayed for a moment, then fell. The man's will-power ran from him in a last supreme effort. Twice more he struggled blindly, but the efforts were feeble. At last with a sigh he gave himself to the cold, which had been waiting. And the cold was kind. Regis Brugiere fell asleep.

Five days later Jim, the black-and-white setter-dog, ceased his restless wanderings to and fro, ceased trying to leap to the oiled window beyond which lay the forest and food in abundance, ceased vain clawings below the shelf-high supplies of flour and bacon, to curl himself by

the door as near as possible to the master who lay without. There he starved, dreaming in a merciful torpor of partridges in the snow. Thus was the way of justice fulfilled in the case of Regis Brugiere and the setter-dog Jim.

VI

THE LIFE OF THE WINDS OF HEAVEN

I

Barbara hesitated long between the open-work stockings and the plain-silk, but finally decided on the former. Then she vouchsafed a pleased little smile to her pleasant little image in the mirror, and stepped through the door into the presence of her aunt. The aunt was appropriately astonished. This was the first time Barbara had spread her dainty chiffon wings in the air of the great north woods. Strangely, daintily incongruous she looked now against the rough walls of the cabin, against the dark fringe of the forest beyond the door.

Barbara was a petite little body with petite little airs of babylike decision. She knew that her greatest attraction lay in the strange backward poise of her head, bringing her chin, pointed and adorable, to the tilt of maddening

charm. She was perfectly aware, too, of her very full red lips, the colour of cherries, but with the satiny finish of the peach; and she could not remain blind to the fact that her light hair and her velvet-black eyes were in rare and delicious contrast. All these things, and more, Barbara knew because a dozen times a day her mirror swore them true. That she was elusively, teasingly, judicially, calmly distracting she knew because, ever since she could remember, men had told her so with varying degrees of bitter humour. She accepted the fact, and carried herself in all circumstances as a queen surrounded by an indefinite number of rights matured to her selection.

After her plain old backwoods aunt had admired and exclaimed over the butterfly so unexpectedly developed from the brown tailor-made chrysalis, Barbara determined to take a walk. She knew that over through that cool, fascinating forest, only a half-mile away, dwelt the Adamses. The Adamses, too, were only of the woods people, but they were human, and chiffon was chiffon, in the wilderness as in the towns. So Barbara announced her intention, and stepped into the sunlight.

The parasol completed her sense of happiness.

She raised it, and slanted it over her shoulder, and drew one of its round tips across her face, playing out to herself a pretty little comedy as she sauntered deliberately down the trail between the stumps and tangled blackberry vines of the clearing. She tilted her chin, and glanced shyly from beneath the brim of her big hat at the solemn stumps, and looked just as pretty as she possibly could for the benefit of the bold, noisy finches. With her light summer dress and her picture-hat and her open-work stockings and her absurd little high-heeled, silver-buckled shoes she had somehow regained the feminine self-confidence which her thick boots and sober brown woods dress had filched from her. For the first time in this whimsical visit to a new environment she was completely happy. Dear little Barbara; she was only eighteen.

Pretty soon the trail entered the great, cool, green forest. Barbara closed her parasol and carried it under one arm, while with the same hand she swept her skirt clear of the ground. She was now a *grande marquise* in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Through little round holes in the undergrowth she could see away down between the trees to dashes of sunlight and green shadows. Always Barbara conducted herself as

though, in the vista, a cavalier was about to appear, who would sweep off his plumed hat in a bow of knightly adoration. She practised the courtesy in return, sinking on one little high-pointed heel with a downward droop of her pretty head and an upward cast of her pretty eyes.

"Oui, c'est un rêve, un rêve doux d'amour,"

she hummed, as the hem of her outspread skirt just swept the ground.

"Phew!" came a most terrible, dreadful sound from the thicket close at hand.

Barbara dropped her parasol, and clasped her heart with both hands, and screamed. From the thicket two slender ears pointed inquiringly toward her, two wide brown eyes stared frightened into hers, a delicate nose dilated with terror. *"Phew!"* snorted the deer again, and vanished in a series of elastic stiff-legged springs.

"Oh!" cried Barbara. "You horrid thing! How you frightened me!"

She picked up her parasol, and resumed her journey in some perturbation of mind, reflecting on the utter rudeness of the deer. Gradually the trail seemed to become more difficult. After

a time it was obstructed by the top of a fallen basswood. Barbara looked about her. She was not on the trail at all.

This was distinctly annoying. Barbara felt a little resentful on account of it. She gathered her skirts closely about her ankles, and tried to pick her way through the undergrowth to the right. The brush was exceedingly difficult to avoid, and a little patch of briers was worse. Finally an ugly stub ripped a hole in the chiffon skirt. This was unbearable. Barbara stamped her foot in vexation. She wanted to cry; and fully made up her mind to do so as soon as she should have regained the trail. In a little while the high beech-ridge over which she had been travelling ended in a narrow cedar-swamp. Then Barbara did a foolish thing; she tried to cross the swamp.

At first she proceeded circumspectly, with an eye to the chiffon. It was torn in a dozen places. Then she thrust one dear little slipper through the moss into black water. Three times the stiff straight rods of the tamarack whipped her smartly across the face. When finally she emerged on the other side of the hundred feet of that miserable cedar-swamp, she had ceased to hold up the chiffon skirt, and was most vexed.

"I think you're just *mean!*" she cried, pettishly, to the still forest; and then caught her breath in the silence of awe.

The forest had become suddenly unfriendly; its kindliness had somehow vanished. In all directions it looked the same; straight towering trunks, saplings, undergrowth. It had shut her in with a wall of green, and hurry in whatever direction she would, Barbara was always inclosed in apparently the same little cell of leaves.

Frightened, but with determination, she commenced to walk rapidly in the direction she believed would lead her out. The bushes now caught at her unheeded. She tore through briers, popples, moose-maples alike. The chiffon was sadly marred, the picture-hat stained and awry, the brave little shoes with their silver buckles and their pointed high heels were dull with wet. And suddenly, as the sun shadows began to lift in the late afternoon, her determined stock of fortitude quite ran out. She stopped short. All about her were the same straight towering trunks, the saplings, the undergrowth. Nothing had changed. It was useless.

She dropped to the ground and gave way to her wild terror, weeping with the gulping sobs

of a frightened child, but even in extremity dabbing her eyes from time to time with an absurd tiny handkerchief of drawn-work border.

Poor little Barbara: she was lost!

II

After a while, subtly, she felt that someone was standing near her. She looked up.

The somebody was a man. He was young. Barbara saw three things—that he had kindly gray eyes, which just now were twinkling at her amusedly; that the handkerchief about his neck was clean; and that the line of his jaw was unusually clear cut and fine. An observant person would have noticed further that the young man carried a rifle and a pack, that he wore a heavily laden belt about his waist, and moccasins on his feet, that his blue-flannel shirt, though clean, was faded, that his skin was as brown as pine-bark. Barbara had no use for such details. The eye was kindly, the jaw was strong, the neatness indicated the gentleman. And a strong, kindly gentleman was just what poor little lost Barbara needed the most. Unconsciously she tilted her pointed chin forward adorably, and smiled.

"Oh, now it's all right, isn't it?" said she.

"I am glad," he replied, the look of amusement deepening in his gray eyes. "And a moment ago it was all wrong. What was the matter?"

"I am lost," answered Barbara, contentedly, as one would say, "My shoes are a little dusty."

"That's bad," sympathised the other. "Where are you lost from?"

"The Adamses' or the Maxwells', I don't know which. I started to go from one to the other. Then there was the deer, and so I got lost."

"I see," he agreed with entire assurance. "And now what are you going to do?"

"I am not going to do anything. You are to take me home."

"To the Adamses or the Maxwells?"

"To whichever is nearest."

The young man seemed to be debating. Barbara glanced at his thoughtful, strong face from under the edge of her picture-hat, which slyly she had rearranged. She liked his face. It was so good-humoured.

"It is almost sunset," replied the youth at length. "You can see the shadows are low. How do you hope to push through the woods after dark? There are wild animals—wolves!" he added, maliciously.

Barbara looked up again with sudden alarm.

"But what shall we do?" she cried, less composedly. "You *must* take me home!"

"I can try," said he, with the resignation of the man who can but die.

The tone had its effect.

"What do you advise?" she asked.

"That we camp here," he proposed, calmly, with an air of finality.

"*Oh!*" dissented Barbara in alarm. "Never! I am afraid of the woods! It will be wet and cold! I am hungry! My feet are just sopping!"

"I will watch all night with my rifle," he told her. "I will fix you a tent, and will cook you a supper, and your feet shall not be wet and cold one moment longer than you will."

"Isn't your home nearer?" she asked.

"My home is where night finds me," he replied.

Barbara meditated. It was going to be dreadful. She knew she would catch her death of cold. But what could she do about it?

" You may fix the wet-feet part," she assented at last.

"All right," agreed the young man with alacrity. He unslung the pack from his back, and removed from the straps a little axe. "Now,

I am not going to be gone but a moment," he assured her, "and while I am away, you must take off your shoes and stockings and put these on." He had been fumbling in his pack, and now produced a pair of thick woollen lumberman's socks.

Barbara held one at arm's length in each hand, and looked at them. Then she looked up at the young man. Then they both laughed.

While her new protector was away, Barbara not only made the suggested changes, but she did marvels with the chiffon. Really, it did not look so bad, considering.

When the young man returned with an armful of hemlock bark and the slivers of a pine-stump, he found her sitting bolt upright on a log, her feet tucked under her. Before the fire he shortly hung the two webs of gossamer and the two dear little ridiculous little high-heeled shoes, with their silver buckles. Then in a most business-like fashion he pitched a diminutive shelter-tent. With equal expedition he built a second fire between two butternut-logs, produced a frying-pan, and set about supper.

The twilight was just falling. Somehow the great forest had lost its air of unfriendliness. The birds were singing in exactly the same way

they used to sing in the tiny woods of the Picnic Grounds. It was difficult to believe in the wilderness. The young man moved here and there with accustomed ease, tending his pot and pan, feeding the fire. Barbara watched him interestedly. Gradually the conviction gained on her that he was worth while, and that he had not once glanced in her direction since he had begun his preparations. At the moment he was engaged in turning over sizzling things in the pan.

"If you please," said Barbara, with her small air of decision, "I am very thirsty."

"You will have to wait until I go to the spring," replied the man without stirring.

Barbara elevated her small nose in righteous indignation. After a long time she just peeped in his direction. He was laughing to himself She hastily elevated her nose again. After all it was very lonely in the woods.

"Supper is ready," he announced after a time.

"I do not think I care for any," she replied, with dignity. She was very tired and hungry and cross, and her eyes were hot.

"Oh, yes you do," he insisted, carelessly. "Come now, before it gets cold."

"I tell you I do not care for any," she returned, haughtily.

For answer he picked her up bodily, carried her ten feet, and deposited her on another log. Beside her lay a clean bit of bark containing a broiled deer-steak, toasted bread, and a cup of tea. She struggled angrily.

"Don't be a fool," the man commanded, sternly, "you need food. You will eat supper, now!"

Barbara looked up at him with wide eyes. Then she began to eat the venison. By and by she remarked, "You *are* rather nice," and after she had drained the last drop of tea she even smiled, a trifle humbly. "Thank you," said she.

It was now dark, and the night had stolen down through the sentry trees to the very outposts of the fire. The man arranged the rubber blanket before it. Barbara sat upon the blanket and leaned her back against the log. He perched above her, producing a pipe.

"May I?" he asked.

Then, when he had puffed a few moments in quiet content, he inquired: "How did you come to get lost?"

She told him.

"That was very foolish," he scolded, severely. "Don't you know any better than to go into the woods without your bearings? It was idiotic!"

"Thank you," replied Barbara, meekly.

"Well, it was!" he insisted, the bronze on his cheek deepening a little.

She watched him for some time, while he watched the flames. She liked to see the light defining boldly the clean-shaven outline of his jaw; she liked to guess at the fire of his gray eyes beneath the shadow of his brow. Not once did he look toward her. Meekly she told herself that this was just. He was dreaming of larger things, seeing in the coals pictures of that romantic, strenuous, mysterious life of which he was a part. He had no room in the fulness of his existence for such as she—she, silly little Barbara, whose only charm was a maddening fashion of pointing outward her adorable chin. She asked him about it, this life of the winds of heaven.

"Are you always in the woods?" she inquired.

"Not always," said he.

"But you live in them a great deal?"

"Yes."

"You must have a great many exciting adventures."

"Not many."

"Where did you come from just now?"

"South."

"Where are you going?"

"Northwest."

"What are you going to do there?"

There ensued a slight pause before the stranger's reply. "Walk through the woods," said he.

"In other words, it's none of my business," retorted Barbara, a little tartly.

"Ah, but you see it's not entirely mine," he explained.

This offered a new field.

"Then you are on a mission?"

"Yes."

"Is it important?"

"Yes."

"How long is it going to take you?"

"Many years."

"What is your name?"

"Garrett Stanton."

"You are a gentleman, aren't you?"

A flicker of amusement twinkled subtly in the corner of his eye. "I suppose you mean gently bred, college-educated. Do you think it's of vast importance?"

Barbara examined him reflectively, her chin in her hand, her elbow on her knee. She looked at his wavy hair, his kindly, humorous gray eyes,

the straight line of his fine-cut nose, his firm lips with the quaint upward twist of the corners, the fine contour of his jaw.

"No-o-o," she agreed, "I don't suppose it does. Only I know you *are* a gentleman," she added, with delightful inconsistence. Stanton bowed gravely to the fire in ironic acknowledgment.

"Why don't you ever look at me?" burst out Barbara, vexed. "Why do you stare at that horrid fire?"

He turned and looked her full in the face. In a moment her eyes dropped before his frank scrutiny. She felt the glow rising across her forehead. When she raised her head again he was staring calmly at the fire as before, one hand clasped under his arm, the other holding the bowl of his brier pipe.

"Now," said he, "I will ask a few questions. Won't this all-night absence alarm your relatives?"

"Oh, no. I often spend the night at the Adamses'. They will think I am there."

"Parents are apt to be anxious."

"But mine are not here, you see."

"What is your name?"

"Barbara Lowe."

He fell silent. Barbara was distinctly piqued.

He might have exhibited a more flattering interest.

"Is that all you want to know about me?" she cried in an injured tone.

"I know all about you now. Listen: Your name is Barbara Lowe; you come from Detroit, where you are not yet 'out'; you are an only child; and eighteen or nineteen years of age."

"Why, who has been telling you about me?" cried Barbara, astonished.

Stanton smiled. "Nobody," he replied. "Don't you know that we woodsmen live by our observation? Do you see anything peculiar about that tree?"

Barbara examined the vegetable in question attentively. "No," she confessed at last.

"There is an animal in it. Look again."

"I can see nothing," repeated Barbara, after a second scrutiny.

Stanton arose. Seizing a brand from the fire, he rapped sharply on the trunk. Then slowly what had appeared to be a portion of the bole began to disintegrate, and in a moment a drowsy porcupine climbed rattling to a place of safety.

"That is how I know about you," explained the woodsman, returning to the fire. "Your remark about staying overnight told me that you were

visiting the Maxwells rather than the Adamses; I knew the latter must be relatives, because a girl who wears pretty summer dresses would not visit mere friends in the wilderness; you would get tired of this life in a few weeks, and so will not care to stay longer; you wear your school-pin still, so you are not yet 'out'; the maker's name in your parasol caused me to guess you from Detroit."

"And about my being an only child?"

"Well," replied Stanton, "you see, you have a little the manner of one who has been a trifle——"

"Spoiled!" finished Barbara, with wicked emphasis.

Stanton merely laughed.

"That is not nice," she reproved, with vast dignity.

A cry, inexpressibly mournful, quivered from the woods close at hand.

"Oh, what is that?" she exclaimed.

"Our friend the porcupine. Don't be frightened."

Down through the trees sighed a little wind. *"Whoo! whoo! whoo!"* droned an owl, monotonously. The sparks from the fire shot up and eddied. A chill was in the air. Barbara's eyes grew heavier and heavier. She tucked her feet

under her and expanded in the warmth like a fireside kitten. Then, had she known it, the man was looking at her, looking at her with a strange, wistful tenderness in his gray eyes. Dear, harmless, innocent little Barbara, who had so confidingly trusted in his goodness!

"Come, little girl," he said, softly, at last.

He arose and held out his hand. Awakened from her abstraction, she looked at him with a faint smile and eyes from which all coquetry had gone, leaving only the child.

"Come," he repeated, "time to turn in."

She arose dutifully. The little tent really looked inviting. The balsam bed proved luxurious, soft as feathers.

"When you are ready," he told her, "let me know. I want to open the tent-flap for the sake of warmth."

The soft woollen blanket was very grateful. When the flap was open, Barbara found that a second fire had been built with a backing of green logs so arranged as to reflect the heat directly into her shelter.

She was very sleepy, yet for a long time she lay awake. The noises of the woods approached mysteriously, and drew about the little camp their mystic circle. Some of them were exceedingly

terrifying, but Barbara did not mind them, for he sat there, his strong, graceful figure silhouetted against the light, smoking his pipe in contemplation. Barbara watched him for a long time, until finally the firelight blurred, and the great, solemn shadows stopped dancing across the forest, and she dozed.

Hours later, as it seemed, some trifling sound awakened her. The heat still streamed gratefully into the tiny shelter; the solemn shadows still danced across the forest; the contemplative figure still stared into the embers, strongly silhouetted by the firelight. A tender compunction stole into Barbara's tender little heart.

"The poor dear," said she, "he has no place to sleep. He is guarding me from the dangers of the forest." Which was quite ridiculous, as any woodsman will know.

Her drowsy eyes watched him wistfully—her mystery, her hero of romance. Again the fire blurred, again the solemn shadows paused. A last thought shaped itself in Barbara's consciousness.

"Why, he must be very old," she said to herself. "He must be twenty-six."

So she fell asleep.

III

Barbara awoke to the sun and the crisp morning air and a delightful feeling that she had slept well and had not been uncomfortable at all. The flap of the tent was discreetly closed. When ready she peeped through the crack and saw Stanton bending over the fire.

In a moment he straightened and approached the tent. When within a few feet he paused. Through the hollow of his hands he cried out the long, musical, morning call of the woodsman.

"R-o-o-oll out!" he cried. The forest took up the sound in dying modulations.

For answer Barbara threw aside the tent-flap and stepped into the sun.

"Good-morning," said she.

"*Salut!*" he replied. "Come and I will show you the spring."

"I am sorry I cannot offer you a better variety for your breakfast. It is only the supper over again," he explained, after she had returned, and had perched like a fluffy bird of paradise on the log. Her cheeks were very pink from the cold water, and her eyes were very

beautiful from the dregs of dreams, and her hair very glittering from the kissing of the early sun. And, wonderful to say, she forgot to thrust out her pointed chin in the fashion so entirely adorable.

She ate with relish, for the woods-hunger was hers. Stanton said nothing. The time was pregnant with unspoken things. All the charming elements of the little episode were crystallising for them, and instinctively Barbara felt that in a few moments she would be compelled to read their meaning.

At last the man said, without stirring:

"Well, I suppose we'd better be going."

"I suppose so," she replied.

They sat there some time longer, staring abstractedly at the kindly green forest; then Stanton abruptly arose and began to construct his pack. The girl did not move.

"Come," he said at last.

She arose obediently.

"Follow close behind me," he advised.

"Yes," said she.

They set off through the greenery. It opened silently before them. Barbara looked back. It had already closed silently behind them, shutting out the episode forever. The little camp had

ceased to exist; the great, ruthless, calm forest had reclaimed its own. Nothing was left.

Nothing was left but the memory and the dream—yes, and the Beginning. Barbara knew it must be that—the Beginning. He would come to see her. She would wear the chiffon, another chiffon, altogether glorious. She would sit on the highest root of the old elm, and he would lie at her feet. Then he could tell her of the enchanted land, of the life of the winds of heaven. He would be her knight, to plunge into the wilderness on the Quest, returning always to her. The picture became at once inexpressibly dear to her.

Then she noticed that he had stopped, and was looking at her in deprecation, and was holding aside the screen of moose-maples. Beyond she could see the familiar clearing, and the smoke from the Maxwell cabin.

She had slept almost within sight of her own doorstep.

"Please forgive me," he was saying. "I meant it only as an interesting little adventure. It has been harmless enough, surely—to you."

His eyes were hungry. Barbara could not find words.

"Good-by," he concluded. "Good-by. You

will forgive me in time—or forget, which is much the same. Believe me, if I have offended you, my punishment is going to be severe. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Barbara, a little breathlessly. She had already forgotten the trick. She could think only that the forest, the unfriendly forest, was about to recall her son.

"Good-by," he repeated again. He should have gone, but did not. The situation became strained.

"When are you coming to see me?" she inquired at length. "I shall be here two weeks yet."

"Never," he replied.

"What do you mean?" she asked after a moment.

"After Painted Rock, the wilderness," he explained, almost bitterly, "the wilderness and solitude for many years—forever!"

"Don't go until to-morrow," she urged.

"I must."

"Why?"

"Because I must be at Painted Rock by Friday, and to reach it I must travel fast and long."

"And if you do not?"

"My mission fails," he replied.

They stood there silent. Barbara dug tiny holes with the tip of her parasol.

"And that is ruin?" she asked softly, without looking up.

"I have struggled hard for many years. The result is this chance."

"I see," she replied, bending her head lower. "It would be a very foolish thing for you to stay, then, wouldn't it?"

He did not reply.

"But you are going to, aren't you?" she went on in a voice almost inaudible. "You must not go like that. I ask you to stay."

Again the pause.

"I cannot," he replied.

She looked up. He was standing erect and tall, his face set in the bronze lines of a resolution, his gray eyes levelled straight and steady beyond her head. Instantly her own spirit flashed.

"I think now you'd better go!" said she superbly.

They faced each other for a moment. Then Barbara dropped her head again, extending her hand.

"You do not know," she whispered, "I have much to forgive."

He hesitated, then touched the tips of her fin-

gers with his lips. She did not look up. With a gesture, which she did not see, he stooped to his pack and swung into the woods.

Barbara stood motionless. Not a line of her figure stirred. Only the chiffon parasol dropped suddenly to the ground.

STORIES OF THE WILD LIFE

I

THE GIRL WHO GOT RATTLED

This is one of the stories of Alfred. There are many of them still floating around the West, for Alfred was in his time very well known. He was a little man, and he was bashful. That is the most that can be said against him; but he was very little and very bashful. When on horseback his legs hardly reached the lower body-line of his mount, and only his extreme agility enabled him to get on successfully. When on foot, strangers were inclined to call him "sonny." In company he never advanced an opinion. If things did not go according to his ideas, he reconstructed the ideas, and made the best of it—only he could make the most efficient best of the poorest ideas of any man on the plains. His attitude was a perpetual sidling apology. It has been said that Alfred killed his men diffidently, without enthusiasm, as though loth to take the responsibility, and this in the pioneer days on the plains was either frivol-

ous affectation, or else—Alfred. With women he was lost. Men would have staked their last ounce of dust at odds that he had never in his life made a definite assertion of fact to one of the opposite sex. When it became absolutely necessary to change a woman's preconceived notions as to what she should do—as, for instance, discouraging her riding through quicksand—he would persuade somebody else to issue the advice. And he would cower in the background blushing his absurd little blushes at his second-hand temerity. Add to this narrow, sloping shoulders, a soft voice, and a diminutive pink-and-white face.

But Alfred could read the prairie like a book. He could ride anything, shoot accurately, was at heart afraid of nothing, and could fight like a little catamount when occasion for it really arose. Among those who knew, Alfred was considered one of the best scouts on the plains. That is why Caldwell, the capitalist, engaged him when he took his daughter out to Deadwood.

Miss Caldwell was determined to go to Deadwood. A limited experience of the lady's sort, where they have wooden floors to the tents, towels to the tent-poles, and expert cooks to the delectation of the campers, had convinced her that "roughing it" was her favorite recreation. So,

of course, Caldwell senior had, sooner or later, to take her across the plains on his annual trip. This was at the time when wagon-trains went by way of Pierre on the north, and the South Fork on the south. Incidental Indians, of homicidal tendencies and undeveloped ideas as to the propriety of doing what they were told, made things interesting occasionally, but not often. There was really no danger to a good-sized train.

The daughter had a fiancé named Allen who liked roughing it, too; so he went along. He and Miss Caldwell rigged themselves out bountifully, and prepared to enjoy the trip.

At Pierre the train of eight wagons was made up, and they were joined by Alfred and Billy Knapp. These two men were interesting, but tyrannical on one or two points—such as getting out of sight of the train, for instance. They were also deficient in reasons for their tyranny. The young people chafed, and, finding Billy Knapp either imperturbable or thick-skinned, they turned their attention to Alfred. Allen annoyed Alfred, and Miss Caldwell thoughtlessly approved of Allen. Between them they succeeded often in shocking fearfully all the little man's finer sensibilities. If it had been a question of Allen alone, the annoyance would soon

have ceased. Alfred would simply have bashfully killed him. But because of his innate courtesy, which so saturated him that his philosophy of life was thoroughly tinged by it, he was silent and inactive.

There is a great deal to recommend a plains journey at first. Later, there is nothing at all to recommend it. It has the same monotony as a voyage at sea, only there is less living room, and, instead of being carried, you must progress to a great extent by your own volition. Also the food is coarse, the water poor, and you cannot bathe. To a plainsman, or a man who has the instinct, these things are as nothing in comparison with the charm of the outdoor life, and the pleasing tingling of adventure. But woman is a creature wedded to comfort. She also has a strange instinctive desire to be entirely alone every once in a while, probably because her experiences, while not less numerous than man's, are mainly psychical, and she needs occasionally time to get "thought up to date." So Miss Caldwell began to get very impatient.

The afternoon of the sixth day Alfred, Miss Caldwell, and Allen rode along side by side. Alfred was telling a self-effacing story of adventure, and Miss Caldwell was listening care-

lessly because she had nothing else to do. Allen chaffed lazily when the fancy took him.

"I happened to have a limb broken at the time," Alfred was observing, parenthetically, in his soft tones, "and so——"

"What kind of a limb?" asked the young Easterner, with direct brutality. He glanced with a half-humourous aside at the girl, to whom the little man had been mainly addressing himself.

Alfred hesitated, blushed, lost the thread of his tale, and finally in great confusion reined back his horse by the harsh Spanish bit. He fell to the rear of the little wagon-train, where he hung his head, and went hot and cold by turns in thinking of such an indiscretion before a lady.

The young Easterner spurred up on the right of the girl's mount.

"He's the queerest little fellow *I* ever saw!" he observed, with a laugh. "Sorry to spoil his story. Was it a good one?"

"It might have been if you hadn't spoiled it," answered the girl, flicking her horse's ears mischievously. The animal danced. "What did you do it for?"

"Oh, just to see him squirm. He'll think about that all the rest of the afternoon, and will

hardly dare look you in the face next time you meet."

"I know. Isn't he funny? The other morning he came around the corner of the wagon and caught me with my hair down. I *wish* you could have seen him!"

She laughed gayly at the memory.

"Let's get ahead of the dust," she suggested.

They drew aside to the firm turf of the prairie and put their horses to a slow lope. Once well ahead of the canvas-covered schooners they slowed down to a walk again.

"Alfred says we'll see them to-morrow," said the girl.

"See what?"

"Why, the Hills! They'll show like a dark streak, down past that butte there—what's its name?"

"Porcupine Tail."

"Oh, yes. And after that it's only three days. Are you glad?"

"Are you?"

"Yes, I believe I am. This life is fun at first, but there's a certain monotony in making your toilet where you have to duck your head because you haven't room to raise your hands, and this barrelled water palls after a time. I think I'll

be glad to see a house again. People like camping about so long——"

"It hasn't gone back on me yet."

"Well, you're a man and can do things."

"Can't you do things?"

"You know I can't. What do you suppose they'd say if I were to ride out just that way for two miles? They'd have a fit."

"Who'd have a fit? Nobody but Alfred, and I didn't know you'd gotten afraid of him yet! I say, just *let's!* We'll have a race, and then come right back." The young man looked boyishly eager.

"It would be nice," she mused. They gazed into each other's eyes like a pair of children, and laughed.

"Why shouldn't we?" urged the young man. "I'm dead sick of staying in the moving circle of these confounded wagons. What's the sense of it all, anyway?"

"Why, Indians, I suppose," said the girl, doubtfully.

"Indians!" he replied, with contempt. "Indians! We haven't seen a sign of one since we left Pierre. I don't believe there's one in the whole blasted country. Besides, you know what Alfred said at our last camp?"

"What did Alfred say?"

"Alfred said he hadn't seen even a teepee-trail, and that they must be all up hunting buffalo. Besides that, you don't imagine for a moment that your father would take you all this way to Deadwood just for a lark, if there was the slightest danger, do you?"

"I don't know; I made him."

She looked out over the long sweeping descent to which they were coming, and the long sweeping ascent that lay beyond. The breeze and the sun played with the prairie grasses, the breeze riffling them over, and the sun silvering their under surfaces thus exposed. It was strangely peaceful, and one almost expected to hear the hum of bees as in a New England orchard. In it all was no sign of life.

"We'd get lost," she said, finally.

"Oh, no, we wouldn't!" he asserted with all the eagerness of the amateur plainsman. "I've got that all figured out. You see, our train is going on a line with that butte behind us and the sun. So if we go ahead, and keep our shadows just pointing to the butte, we'll be right in their line of march."

He looked to her for admiration of his cleverness. She seemed convinced. She agreed, and

sent him back to her wagon for some article of invented necessity. While he was gone she slipped softly over the little hill to the right, cantered rapidly over two more, and slowed down with a sigh of satisfaction. One alone could watch the directing shadow as well as two. She was free and alone. It was the one thing she had desired for the last six days of the long plains journey, and she enjoyed it now to the full. No one had seen her go. The drivers droned stupidly along, as was their wont; the occupants of the wagons slept, as was their wont; and the diminutive Alfred was hiding his blushes behind clouds of dust in the rear, as was not his wont at all. He had been severely shocked, and he might have brooded over it all the afternoon, if a discovery had not startled him to activity.

On a bare spot of the prairie he discerned the print of a hoof. It was not that of one of the train's animals. Alfred knew this, because just to one side of it, caught under a grass-blade so cunningly that only the little scout's eyes could have discerned it at all, was a single blue bead. Alfred rode out on the prairie to right and left, and found the hoof-prints of about thirty ponies. He pushed his hat back and wrinkled his brow, for the one thing he was looking for he could not

find—the two narrow furrows made by the ends of teepee-poles dragging along on either side of the ponies. The absence of these indicated that the band was composed entirely of bucks, and bucks were likely to mean mischief.

He pushed ahead of the whole party, his eyes fixed earnestly on the ground. At the top of the hill he encountered the young Easterner. The latter looked puzzled, in a half-humourous way.

"I left Miss Caldwell here a half-minute ago," he observed to Alfred, "and I guess she's given me the slip. Scold her good for me when she comes in—will you?" He grinned, with good-natured malice at the idea of Alfred's scolding anyone.

Then Alfred surprised him.

The little man straightened suddenly in his saddle and uttered a fervent curse. After a brief circle about the prairie, he returned to the young man.

"You go back to th' wagons, and wake up Billy Knapp, and tell him this—that I've gone scoutin' some, and I want him to *watch out*. Understand? *Watch out!*"

"What?" began the Easterner, bewildered.

"I'm agoin' to find her," said the little man, decidedly.

"You don't think there's any danger, do you?" asked the Easterner, in anxious tones. "Can't I help you?"

"You do as I tell you," replied the little man, shortly, and rode away.

He followed Miss Caldwell's trail quite rapidly, for the trail was fresh. As long as he looked intently for hoof-marks, nothing was to be seen, the prairie was apparently virgin; but by glancing the eye forty or fifty yards ahead, a faint line was discernible through the grasses.

Alfred came upon Miss Caldwell seated quietly on her horse in the very centre of a prairie-dog town, and so, of course, in the midst of an area of comparatively desert character. She was amusing herself by watching the marmots as they barked, or watched, or peeped at her, according to their distance from her. The sight of Alfred was not welcome, for he frightened the marmots.

When he saw Miss Caldwell, Alfred grew bashful again. He sidled his horse up to her and blushed.

"I'll show you th' way back, miss," he said, diffidently.

"Thank you," replied Miss Caldwell, with a slight coldness, "I can find my own way back."

"Yes, of course," hastened Alfred, in an

agony. "But don't you think we ought to start back now? I'd like to go with you, miss, if you'd let me. You see the afternoon's quite late."

Miss Caldwell cast a quizzical eye at the sun.

"Why, it's hours yet till dark!" she said, amusedly.

Then Alfred surprised Miss Caldwell.

His diffident manner suddenly left him. He jumped like lightning from his horse, threw the reins over the animal's head so he would stand, and ran around to face Miss Caldwell.

"Here, jump down!" he commanded.

The soft Southern *burr* of his ordinary conversation had given place to a clear incisiveness. Miss Caldwell looked at him amazed.

Seeing that she did not at once obey, Alfred actually began to fumble hastily with the straps that held her riding-skirt in place. This was so unusual in the bashful Alfred that Miss Caldwell roused and slipped lightly to the ground.

"Now what?" she asked.

Alfred, without replying, drew the bit to within a few inches of the animal's hoofs, and tied both fetlocks firmly together with the double-loop. This brought the pony's nose down close to his shackled feet. Then he did the same thing with his own beast. Thus neither animal could

so much as hobble one way or the other. They were securely moored.

Alfred stepped a few paces to the eastward. Miss Caldwell followed.

"Sit down," said he.

Miss Caldwell obeyed with some nervousness. She did not understand at all, and that made her afraid. She began to have a dim fear lest Alfred might have gone crazy. His next move strengthened this suspicion. He walked away ten feet and raised his hand over his head, palm forward. She watched him so intently that for a moment she saw nothing else. Then she followed the direction of his gaze, and uttered a little sobbing cry.

Just below the sky-line of the first slope to eastward was silhouetted a figure on horseback. The figure on horseback sat motionless.

"We're in for fight," said Alfred, coming back after a moment. "He won't answer my peace-sign, and he's a Sioux. We can't make a run for it through this dog-town. We've just got to stand 'em off."

He threw down and back the lever of his old 44 Winchester, and softly uncocked the arm. Then he sat down by Miss Caldwell.

From various directions, silently, warriors on

horseback sprang into sight and moved dignifiedly toward the first-comer, forming at the last a band of perhaps thirty men. They talked together for a moment, and then one by one, at regular intervals, detached themselves and began circling at full speed to the left, throwing themselves behind their horses, and yelling shrill-voiced, but firing no shot as yet.

"They'll rush us," speculated Alfred. "We're too few to monkey with this way. This is a bluff."

The circle about the two was now complete. After watching the whirl of figures a few minutes, and the motionless landscape beyond, the eye became dizzied and confused.

"They won't have no picnic," went on Alfred, with a little chuckle. "Dog-hole's as bad fer them as fer us. They don't know how to fight. If they was to come in on all sides, I couldn't handle 'em, but they always rush in a bunch, like *damn* fools!" and then Alfred became suffused with blushes, and commenced to apologise abjectly and profusely to a girl who had heard neither the word nor its atonement. The savages and the approaching fight were all she could think of.

Suddenly one of the Sioux threw himself for-

ward under his horse's neck and fired. The bullet went wild, of course, but it shrieked with the rising inflection of a wind-squall through bared boughs, seeming to come ever nearer. Miss Caldwell screamed and covered her face. The savages yelled in chorus.

The one shot seemed to be the signal for a spattering fire all along the line. Indians never clean their rifles, rarely get good ammunition, and are deficient in the philosophy of hind-sights. Besides this, it is not easy to shoot at long range in a constrained position from a running horse. Alfred watched them contemptuously in silence.

"If they keep that up long enough, the wagon-train may hear 'em," he said, finally. "Wisht we weren't so far to nor-rard. There, it's comin'!" he said, more excitedly.

The chief had paused, and, as the warroirs came to him, they threw their ponies back on their haunches, and sat motionless. They turned the ponies' heads toward the two.

Alfred arose deliberately for a better look.

"Yes, that's right," he said to himself, "that's old Lone Pine, sure thing. I reckon we-all's got to make a *good* fight!"

The girl had sunk to the ground, and was shak-

ing from head to foot. It is not nice to be shot at in the best of circumstances, but to be shot at by odds of thirty to one, and the thirty of an outlandish and terrifying species, is not nice at all. Miss Caldwell had gone to pieces badly, and Alfred looked grave. He thoughtfully drew from its holster his beautiful Colt's with its ivory handle, and laid it on the grass. Then he blushed hot and cold, and looked at the girl doubtfully. A sudden movement in the group of savages, as the war-chief rode to the front, decided him.

"Miss Caldwell," he said.

The girl shivered and moaned.

Alfred dropped to his knees and shook her shoulder roughly.

"Look up here," he commanded. "We ain't got but a minute."

Composed a little by the firmness of his tone, she sat up. Her face had gone chalky, and her hair had partly fallen over her eyes.

"Now, listen to every word," he said, rapidly. "Those Injins is goin' to rush us in a minute. P'r'aps I can break them, but I don't know. In that pistol there, I'll always save two shots—understand?—it's always loaded. If I see it's all up, I'm a-goin' to shoot you with one of 'em, and myself with the other."

"Oh!" cried the girl, her eyes opening wildly. She was paying close enough attention now.

"And if they kill me first"—he reached forward and seized her wrist impressively—"if they kill me first, you must take that pistol and shoot yourself. Understand? Shoot yourself—in the head—here!"

He tapped his forehead with a stubby forefinger.

The girl shrank back in horror. Alfred snapped his teeth together and went on grimly.

"If they get hold of you," he said, with solemnity, "they'll first take off every stitch of your clothes, and when you're quite naked they'll stretch you out on the ground with a rawhide to each of your arms and legs. And then they'll drive a stake through the middle of your body into the ground—and leave you there—to die —slowly!"

And the girl believed him, because, incongruously enough, even through her terror she noticed that at this, the most immodest speech of his life, Alfred did not blush. She looked at the pistol lying on the turf with horrified fascination.

The group of Indians, which had up to now remained fully a thousand yards away, suddenly

screeched and broke into a run directly toward the dog-town.

There is an indescribable rush in a charge of savages. The little ponies make their feet go so fast, the feathers and trappings of the warriors stream behind so frantically, the whole attitude of horse and man is so eager, that one gets an impression of fearful speed and resistless power. The horizon seems full of Indians.

As if this were not sufficiently terrifying, the air is throbbing with sound. Each Indian pops away for general results as he comes jumping along, and yells shrilly to show what a big warrior he is, while underneath it all is the hurried monotone of hoof-beats becoming ever louder, as the roar of an increasing rainstorm on the roof. It does not seem possible that anything can stop them.

Yet there is one thing that can stop them, if skilfully taken advantage of, and that is their lack of discipline. An Indian will fight hard when cornered, or when heated by lively resistance, but he hates to go into it in cold blood. As he nears the opposing rifle, this feeling gets stronger. So often a man with nerve enough to hold his fire, can break a fierce charge merely by waiting until it is within fifty yards or so, and

then suddenly raising the muzzle of his gun. If he had gone to shooting at once, the affair would have become a combat, and the Indians would have ridden him down. As it is, each has had time to think. By the time the white man is ready to shoot, the suspense has done its work. Each savage knows that but one will fall, but, cold-blooded, he does not want to be that one; and, since in such disciplined fighters it is each for himself, he promptly ducks behind his mount and circles away to the right or the left. The whole band swoops and divides, like a flock of swift-winged terns on a windy day.

This Alfred relied on in the approaching crisis.

The girl watched the wild sweep of the warriors with strained eyes. She had to grasp her wrist firmly to keep from fainting, and she seemed incapable of thought. Alfred sat motionless on a dog-mound, his rifle across his lap. He did not seem in the least disturbed.

"It's good to fight again," he murmured, gently fondling the stock of his rifle. "Come on, ye devils! Oho!" he cried as a warrior's horse went down in a dog-hole, "I thought so!"

His eyes began to shine.

The ponies came skipping here and there,

nimbly dodging in and out between the dog-holes. Their riders shot and yelled wildly, but none of the bullets went lower than ten feet. The circle of their advance looked somehow like the surge shoreward of a great wave, and the similarity was heightened by the nodding glimpses of the light eagles' feathers in their hair.

The run across the honey-combed plain was hazardous—even to Indian ponies—and three went down kicking, one after the other. Two of the riders lay stunned. The third sat up and began to rub his knee. The pony belonging to Miss Caldwell, becoming frightened, threw itself and lay on its side, kicking out frantically with its hind legs.

At the proper moment Alfred cocked his rifle and rose swiftly to his knees. As he did so, the mound on which he had been kneeling caved into the hole beneath it, and threw him forward on his face. With a furious curse, he sprang to his feet and levelled his rifle at the thick of the press. The scheme worked. In a flash every savage disappeared behind his pony, and nothing was to be seen but an arm and a leg. The band divided on either hand as promptly as though the signal for such a drill had been given, and swept gracefully around in two long circles until it reined up mo-

tionless at nearly the exact point from which it had started on its imposing charge. Alfred had not fired a shot.

He turned to the girl with a short laugh.

She lay face upward on the ground, staring at the sky with wide-open, horror-stricken eyes. In her brow was a small blackened hole, and under her head, which lay strangely flat against the earth, the grasses had turned red. Near her hand lay the heavy Colt's 44.

Alfred looked at her a minute without winking. Then he nodded his head.

"It was 'cause I fell down that hole—she thought they'd got me!" he said aloud to himself. "Pore little gal! She hadn't ought to have did it!"

He blushed deeply, and, turning his face away, pulled down her skirt until it covered her ankles. Then he picked up his Winchester and fired three shots. The first hit directly back of the ear one of the stunned Indians who had fallen with his horse. The second went through the other stunned Indian's chest. The third caught the Indian with the broken leg between the shoulders just as he tried to get behind his struggling pony.

Shortly after, Billy Knapp and the wagon-train came along.

II

BILLY'S TENDERFOOT

During one spring of the early seventies Billy Knapp ran a species of road-house and hotel at the crossing of the Deadwood and Big Horn trails through Custer Valley. Travellers changing from one to the other frequently stopped there over night. He sold accommodations for man and beast, the former comprising plenty of whiskey, the latter plenty of hay. That was the best anyone could say of it. The hotel was of logs, two-storied, with partitions of sheeting to insure a certain privacy of sight if not of sound; had three beds and a number of bunks; and boasted of a woman cook—one of the first in the Hills. Billy did not run it long. He was too restless. For the time being, however, he was interested and satisfied.

The personnel of the establishment consisted of Billy and the woman, already mentioned, and an ancient Pistol of the name of Charley. The

latter wore many firearms, and had a good deal to say, but had never, as Billy expressed it, "made good." This in the West could not be for lack of opportunity. His functions were those of general factotum.

One evening Billy sat chair-tilted against the walls of the hotel waiting for the stage. By and by it drew in. Charley hobbled out, carrying buckets of water for the horses. The driver flung the reins from him with the lordly insolence of his privileged class, descended slowly, and swaggered to the bar-room for his drink. Billy followed to serve it.

"Luck," said the driver, and crooked his elbow.

"Anything new?" queried Billy.

"Nope."

"Held up?"

"Nope. Black Hank's over in th' limestone."

That exhausted the situation. The two men puffed silently for a moment at their pipes. In an instant the driver turned to go.

"I got you a tenderfoot," he remarked then, casually; "I reckon he's outside."

"Guess I ambles forth and sees what fer a tenderfoot it is," replied Billy, hastening from behind the bar.

The tenderfoot was seated on a small trunk

just outside the door. As he held his hat in his hand, Billy could see his dome-like bald head. Beneath the dome was a little pink-and-white face, and below that narrow, sloping shoulders, a flat chest, and bandy legs. He wore a light check suit, and a flannel shirt whose collar was much too large for him. Billy took this all in while passing. As the driver climbed to the seat, the hotel-keeper commented.

"Say, Hen," said he, "would you stuff it or put it under a glass case?"

"I'd serve it, a lay Tooloose," replied the driver, briefly, and brought his long lash 8-shaped across the four startled backs of his horses.

Billy turned to the reinspection of his guest, and met a deprecating smile.

"Can I get a room here fer to-night?" he inquired in a high, piping voice.

"You kin," said Billy, shortly, and began to howl for Charley.

That patriarch appeared around the corner, as did likewise the cook, a black-eyed, red-cheeked creature, afterward counted by Billy as one of his eight matrimonial ventures.

"Snake this stranger's war-bag into th' shack," commanded Billy, "and, Nell, jest nat'rally rustle a few grub."

The stranger picked up a small hand-satchel and followed Charley into the building. When, a little later, he reappeared for supper, he carried the hand-bag with him, and placed it under the bench which flanked the table. Afterward he deposited it near his hand while enjoying a pipe outside. Naturally, all this did not escape Billy.

"Stranger," said he, "yo' seems mighty wedded to that thar satchel."

"Yes, sir," piped the stranger. Billy snorted at the title. "I has some personal belongin's which is valuable to me." He opened the bag and produced a cheap portrait of a rather cheap-looking woman. "My mother that was," said he.

Billy snorted again and went inside. He hated sentiment of all kinds.

The two men sat opposite each other and ate supper, which was served by the red-cheeked girl. The stranger kept his eyes on his plate while she was in the room. He perched on the edge of the bench with his feet tucked under him and resting on the toes. When she approached, the muscles of his shoulders and upper arms grew rigid with embarrassment, causing strange awkward movements of the hands. He answered in monosyllables.

Billy ate expansively and earnestly. Toward the close of the meal Charley slipped into place beside him. Charley was out of humour, and found the meat cold.

"Damn yore soul, Nell," he cried, "this yere ain't fitten fer a *hog* to eat!"

The girl did not mind; nor did Billy. It was the country's mode of speech. The stranger dropped his knife.

"I don't wonder you don't like it, then," said he, with a funny little blaze of anger.

"Meanin' what?" shouted Charley, threateningly.

"You sure mustn't speak to a lady that way," replied the stranger, firmly, in his little piping voice.

Billy caught the point and exploded in a mighty guffaw.

"Bully fer you!" he cried, slapping his knee; "struck pyrites (he pronounced it pie-rights) fer shore that trip, Charley."

The girl, too, laughed, but quietly. She was just a little touched, though only this winter she had left Bismarck because the place would have no more of her.

In the face of Billy's approval, the patriarch fell silent.

About midnight the four inmates of the frontier hotel were awakened by a tremendous racket outside. The stranger arose, fully clothed, from his bunk, and peered through the narrow open window. A dozen horses were standing grouped in charge of a single mounted man, indistinguishable in the dark. Out of the open door a broad band of light streamed from the saloon, whence came the noise of voices and of boots tramping about.

"It is Black Hank," said Billy, at his elbow, "Black Hank and his outfit. He hitches to this yere snubbin'-post occasional."

Black Hank in the Hills would have translated to Jesse James farther south.

The stranger turned suddenly energetic.

"Don't you make no fight?" he asked.

"Fight?" said Billy, wondering. "Fight? Co'se not. Hank don't plunder *me* none. He jest ambles along an' helps himself, and leaves th' dust fer it every time. I jest lays low an' lets him operate. I never has no *dealin's* with him, understand. He jest nat'rally waltzes in an' plants his grub-hooks on what he needs. *I* don't know nothin' about it. *I'm* dead asleep."

He bestowed a shadowy wink on the stranger

Below, the outlaws moved here and there.

"Billy!" shouted a commanding voice, "Billy Knapp!"

The hotel-keeper looked perplexed.

"Now, what's he tollin' *me* for?" he asked of the man by his side.

"Billy!" shouted the voice again, "come down here, you Siwash. I want to palaver with you!"

"All right, Hank," replied Billy.

He went to his "room," and buckled on a heavy belt; then descended the steep stairs. The bar-room was lighted and filled with men. Some of them were drinking and eating; others were strapping provisions into portable form. Against the corner of the bar a tall figure of a man leaned smoking—a man lithe, active, and muscular, with a keen dark face, and black eyebrows which met over his nose. Billy walked silently to this man.

"What is it?" he asked, shortly. "This yere ain't in th' agreement."

"I know that," replied the stranger.

"Then leave yore dust and vamoose."

"My dust is there," replied Black Hank, placing his hand on a buckskin bag at his side, "and you're paid, Billy Knapp. I want to ask you a question. Standing Rock has sent fifty thousand dollars in greenbacks to Spotted Tail. The

messenger went through here to-day. Have you seen him?"

"Nary messenger," replied Billy, in relief. "Stage goes empty."

Charley had crept down the stairs and into the room.

"What in hell are yo' doin' yere, yo' ranikaboo ijit?" inquired Billy, truculently.

"That thar stage ain't what you calls *empty*," observed Charley, unmoved.

A light broke on Billy's mind. He remarked the valise which the stranger had so carefully guarded; and though his common-sense told him that an inoffensive non-combatant such as his guest would hardly be chosen as express messenger, still the bare possibility remained.

"Yo're right," he agreed, carelessly, "thar is one tenderfoot, who knows as much of ridin' express as a pig does of a ruffled shirt."

"I notes he's almighty particular about that carpet-bag of his'n," insisted Charley.

The man against the counter had lost nothing of the scene. Billy's denial, his hesitation, his half-truth all looked suspicious to him. With one swift, round sweep of the arm he had Billy covered. Billy's hands shot over his head without the necessity of command.

The men ceased their occupations and gathered about. Scenes of this sort were too common to elicit comment or arouse excitement. They knew perfectly well the *laissez-faire* relations which obtained between the two Westerners.

"Now," said Black Hank, angrily, in a low tone, "I want to know why in hell you tried that monkey game!"

Billy, wary and unafraid, replied that he had tried no game, that he had forgotten the tenderfoot for the moment, and that he did not believe the latter would prove to be the sought-for express messenger.

One of the men, at a signal from his leader, relieved Billy's heavy belt of considerable weight. Then the latter was permitted to sit on a cracker-box. Two more mounted the stairs. In a moment they returned to report that the upper story contained no human beings, strange or otherwise, except the girl, but that there remained a small trunk. Under further orders, they dragged the trunk down into the bar-room. It was broken open and found to contain nothing but clothes—of the plainsman's cut, material, and state of wear; a neatly folded Mexican saddle showing use, and a raw-hide quirt.

"Hell of a tenderfoot!" said Black Hank, contemptuously.

The outlaws had already scattered outside to look for the trail. In this they were unsuccessful, reporting, indeed, that not the faintest sign indicated escape in any direction.

Billy knew his man. The tightening of Black Hank's close-knit brows meant but one thing. One does not gain chieftainship of any kind in the West without propping his ascendency with acts of ruthless decision. Billy leaped from his cracker-box with the suddenness of the puma, seized Black Hank firmly about the waist, whirled him into a sort of shield, and began an earnest struggle for the instant possession of the outlaw's drawn revolver. It was a gallant attempt, but an unsuccessful one. In a moment Billy was pinioned to the floor, and Black Hank was rubbing his abraded fore-arm. After that the only question was whether it should be rope or bullet.

Now, when Billy had gone downstairs, the stranger had wasted no further time at the window. He had in his possession fifty thousand dollars in greenbacks which he was to deliver as soon as possible to the Spotted Tail agency in Wyoming. The necessary change of stage lines

had forced him to stay over night at Billy Knapp's hotel.

The messenger seized his bag and softly ran along through the canvas-partitioned room wherein Billy slept, to a narrow window which he had already noticed gave out almost directly into the pine woods. The window was of oiled paper, and its catch baffled him. He knew it should slide back; but it refused to slide. He did not dare break the paper because of the crackling noise. A voice at his shoulder startled him.

"I'll show you," whispered the red-cheeked girl.

She was wrapped loosely in a blanket, her hair falling about her shoulders, and her bare feet showed beneath her coverings. The little man suffered at once an agony of embarrassment in which the thought of his errand was lost. It was recalled to him by the girl.

"There you are," she whispered, showing him the open window.

"Thank you," he stammered, painfully, "I assure you—I wish——"

The girl laughed under her breath.

"That's all right," she said, heartily, "I owe you that for calling old whiskers off his bronc," and she kissed him.

The messenger, trembling with self-consciousness, climbed hastily through the window; ran the broad loop of the satchel up his arm; and, instead of dropping to the ground, as the girl had expected, swung himself lightly into the branches of a rather large scrub-oak that grew near. She listened to the rustle of the leaves for a moment as he neared the trunk, and then, unable longer to restrain her curiosity in regard to the doings below, turned to the stairway.

As she did so, two men mounted. They examined the three rooms of the upper story hastily but carefully, paying scant attention to her, and departed swearing. In a few moments they returned for the stranger's trunk. Nell followed them down the stairs as far as the doorway. There she heard and saw things, and fled in bitter dismay to the back of the house when Billy Knapp was overpowered.

At the window she knelt, clasping her hands and sinking her head between her arms. Women in the West, at least women like Nell, do not weep. But she came near it. Suddenly she raised her head. A voice next her ear had addressed her.

She looked here and there and around, but could discover nothing.

"Here, outside," came the low, guarded voice, "in the tree."

Then she saw that the little stranger had not stirred from his first alighting-place.

"Beg yore pardon, ma'am, fer startling you or fer addressing you at all, which I shouldn't, but——"

"Oh, never mind that," said the girl, impatiently, shaking back her hair. So deprecating and timid were the tones, that almost without an effort of the imagination she could picture the little man's blushes and his half-sidling method of delivery. At this supreme moment his littleness and lack of self-assertion jarred on her mood. "What're you doin' there? Thought you'd vamoosed."

"It was safer here," explained the stranger, "I left no trail."

She nodded comprehension of the commonsense of this.

"But, ma'am, I took the liberty of speakin' to you because you seems to be in trouble. Of course, I ain't got no right to *ask*, an' if you don't care to tell me——"

"They're goin' to kill Billy," broke in Nell, with a sob.

"What for?"

"I don't jest rightly make out. They's after someone, and they thinks Billy's cacheing him. I reckon it's you. Billy ain't cacheing nothin', but they thinks he is."

"It's me they's after, all right. Now, you know where I am, why don't you tell them and save Billy?"

The girl started, but her keen Western mind saw the difficulty at once.

"They thinks Billy pertects you jest th' same."

"Do you love him?" asked the stranger.

"God knows I'm purty tough," confessed Nell, sobbing, "but I jest do that!" and she dropped her head again.

The invisible stranger in the gloom fell silent, considering.

"I'm a pretty rank proposition, myself," said he at last, as if to himself, "and I've got a job on hand which same I oughta put through without givin' attention to anything else. As a usual thing folks don't care fer me, and I don't care much fer folks. Women especial. They drives me plumb tired. I reckon I don't stack up very high in th' blue chips when it comes to cashin' in with the gentle sex, anyhow; but in general they gives me as much notice as they lavishes on a doodle-bug. I ain't kickin', you understand,

nary bit; but onct in a dog's age I kind of hankers fer a decent look from one of 'em. I ain't never had no women-folks of my own, never. Sometimes I thinks it would be some scrumptious to know a little gal waitin' fer me somewhere. They ain't none. They never will be. I ain't built that way. You treated me white to-night. You're th' first woman that ever kissed me of her own accord."

The girl heard a faint scramble, then the soft *pat* of someone landing on his feet. Peering from the window she made out a faint, shadowy form stealing around the corner of the hotel. She put her hand to her heart and listened. Her understanding of the stranger's motives was vague at best, but she had caught his confession that her kiss had meant much to him, and even in her anxiety she felt an inclination to laugh. She had bestowed that caress as she would have kissed the cold end of a dog's nose.

The men below stairs had, after some discussion, decided on bullet. This was out of consideration for Billy's standing as a frontiersman. Besides, he had stolen no horses. In order not to delay matters, the execution was fixed for the present time and place. Billy stood with his back to the logs of his own hotel, his hands and feet

bound, but his eyes uncovered. He had never lost his nerve. In the short respite which preparation demanded, he told his opponents what he thought of them.

"Proud?" he concluded a long soliloquy as if to the reflector of the lamp. "Proud?" he repeated, reflectively. "This yere Hank's jest that proud he's all swelled up like a poisoned pup. Ain't everyone kin corall a man sleepin' and git fifty thousand without turnin' a hair."

Black Hank distributed three men to do the business. There were no heroics. The execution of this man was necessary to him, not because he was particularly angry over the escape of the messenger—he expected to capture that individual in due time—but in order to preserve his authority over his men. He was in the act of moving back to give the shooters room, when he heard behind him the door open and shut.

He turned. Before the door stood a small consumptive-looking man in a light check suit. The tenderfoot carried two short-barrelled Colt's revolvers, one of which he presented directly at Black Hank.

" 'Nds up!" he commanded, sharply.

Hank was directly covered, so he obeyed. The new-comer's eye had a strangely restless qual-

ity. Of the other dozen inmates of the room, eleven were firmly convinced that the weapon and eye not directly levelled at their leader were personally concerned with themselves. The twelfth thought he saw his chance. To the bewildered onlookers there seemed to be a flash and a bang, instantaneous; then things were as before. One of the stranger's weapons still pointed at Black Hank's breast; the other at each of the rest. Only the twelfth man, he who had seen his chance, had collapsed forward to the floor. No one could assure himself positively that he had discerned the slightest motion on the part of the stranger.

"Now," said the latter, sharply, "one at a time, gentlemen. Drop yore gun," this last to Black Hank, "muzzle down. Drop it! Correct!"

One of the men in the back of the room stirred slightly on the ball of his foot.

"Steady, there!" warned the stranger. The man stiffened.

"Next gent," went on the little man, subtly indicating another. The latter obeyed without hesitation. "Next. Now you. Now you in th' corner."

One after another the pistols clattered to the floor. Not for an instant could a single inmate

of the apartment, armed or unarmed, flatter himself that his slightest motion was unobserved. They were like tigers on the crouch, ready to spring the moment the man's guard lowered. It did not lower. The huddled figure on the floor reminded them of what might happen. They obeyed.

"Step back," commanded the stranger next. In a moment he had them standing in a row against the wall, rigid, upright, their hands over their heads. Then for the first time the stranger moved from his position by the door.

"Call her," he said to Billy, "th' girl."

Billy raised his voice. "Nell! Oh, Nell!"

In a moment she appeared in the doorway at the foot of the stairs, without hesitation or fear. When she perceived the state of affairs, she brightened almost mischievously.

"Would you jest as soon, ma'am, if it ain't troubling you too much, jest nat'rally sort of untie Billy?" requested the stranger.

She did so. The hotel-keeper stretched his arms.

"Now, pick up th' guns, please."

The two set about it.

"Where's that damn ol' reprobate?" inquired Billy, truculently, looking about for Charley.

The patriarch had quietly slipped away.

"You kin drop them hands," advised the stranger, lowering the muzzles of his weapons. The leader started to say something.

"You shut up!" said Billy, selecting his own weapons from the heap.

The stranger suddenly picked up one of the Colt's single-action revolvers which lay on the floor, and, holding the trigger back against the guard, exploded the six charges by hitting the hammer smartly with the palm of his hand. In the thrusting motion of this discharge he evidently had design, for the first six wine-glasses on Billy's bar were shivered. It was wonderful work, rattling fire, quicker than a self-cocker even. He selected another weapon. From a pile of tomato-cans he took one and tossed it into the air. Before it had fallen he had perforated it twice, and as it rolled along the floor he helped its progression by four more bullets which left streams of tomato-juice where they had hit. The room was full of smoke. The group watched, fascinated.

Then the men against the wall grew rigid. Out of the film of smoke long, vivid streams of fire flashed toward them, now right, now left, like the alternating steam of a locomotive's pistons.

Smash, smash! Smash, smash! hit the bullets with regular thud. With the twelfth discharge the din ceased. Midway in the space between the heads of each pair of men against the wall was a round hole. No one was touched.

A silence fell. The smoke lightened and blew slowly through the open door. The horses, long since deserted by their guardians in favour of the excitement within, whinnied. The stranger dropped the smoking Colts, and quietly reproduced his own short-barrelled arms from his side-pockets, where he had thrust them. Billy broke the silence at last.

"That's *shootin'!*" he observed, with a sigh.

"Them fifty thousand is outside," clicked the stranger. "Do you want them?"

There was no reply.

"I aims to pull out on one of these yere hosses of yours," said he. "Billy he's all straight. He doesn't know nothin' about me."

He collected the six-shooters from the floor.

"I jest takes these with me for a spell," he continued. "You'll find them, if you look hard enough, along on th' trail—also yore broncs."

He backed toward the door.

"I'm layin' fer th' man that sticks his head out that door," he warned.

"Stranger," said Black Hank as he neared the door.

The little man paused.

"Might I ask yore name?"

"My name is Alfred," replied the latter.

Black Hank looked chagrined.

"I've hearn tell of you," he acknowledged.

The stranger's eye ran over the room, and encountered that of the girl. He shrank into himself and blushed.

"Good-night," he said, hastily, and disappeared. A moment later the beat of hoofs became audible as he led the bunch of horses away.

For a time there was silence. Then Billy, "By God, Hank, I means to stand in with you, but you let that kid alone, or I plugs you!"

"Kid, huh!" grunted Hank. "Alfred a kid! I've hearn tell of him."

"What've you heard?" inquired the girl.

"He's th' plumb best scout on th' southern trail," replied Black Hank.

The year following, Billy Knapp, Alfred, and another man named Jim Buckley took across to the Hills the only wagon-train that dared set out that summer.

III

THE TWO CARTRIDGES

This happened at the time Billy Knapp drove stage between Pierre and Deadwood. I think you can still see the stage in Buffalo Bill's show. Lest confusion arise and the reader be inclined to credit Billy with more years than are his due, it might be well also to mention that the period was some time after the summer he and Alfred and Jim Buckley had made their famous march with the only wagon-train that dared set out, and some time before Billy took to mining. Jim had already moved to Montana.

The journey from Pierre to Deadwood amounted to something. All day long the trail led up and down long grassy slopes, and across sweeping, intervening flats. While climbing the slopes, you could never get your experience to convince you that you were not, on topping the hill, about to overlook the entire country for miles around. This never happened; you saw no farther than the next roll of the prairie. While

hurtling down the slopes, you saw the intervening flat as interminably broad and hot and breathless, or interminably broad and icy and full of arctic winds, according to the season of the year. Once in a dog's age you came to a straggling fringe of cottonwood-trees, indicating a creek bottom. The latter was either quite dry or in raging flood. Close under the hill huddled two buildings, half logs, half mud. There the horses were changed by strange men with steel glints in their eyes, like those you see under the brows of a north-country tug-boat captain. Passengers could there eat flap-jacks architecturally warranted to hold together against the most vigorous attack of the gastric juices, and drink green tea that tasted of tannin and really demanded for its proper accommodation porcelain-lined insides. It was not an inspiring trip.

Of course, Billy did not accompany the stage all of the way; only the last hundred miles; but the passengers did, and by the time they reached Billy they were usually heartily sick of their undertaking. Once a tenderfoot came through in the fall of the year, simply for the love of adventure. He got it.

"Driver," said he to Billy, as the brakes set for another plunge, "were you ever held up?"

Billy had been deluged with questions like this for the last two hours. Usually he looked straight in front of him, spat accurately between the tail of the wheel-horse and the whiffle-tree, and answered in monosyllables. The tenderfoot did not know that asking questions was not the way to induce Billy to talk.

"Held up?" replied Billy, with scorn. "Young feller, I is held up thirty-seven times in th' last year."

"Thunderation!" exclaimed the tenderfoot. "What do you do? Do you have much trouble getting away? Have you had much fighting?"

"Fight nothin'. I ain't hired to fight. I'm hired to drive stage."

"And you just let them go through you?" cried the tenderfoot.

Billy was stung by the contempt in the stranger's tone.

"Go through nothin'," he explained. "They isn't touchin' *me* none whatever. Put her down fer argument that I'm damn fool enough to sprinkle lead 'round some, and that I gets away. What happens? Nex' time I drives stage some of these yere agents massacrees me from behind a bush. Whar do I come in? Nary bit!"

The tenderfoot, struck by the logic of this

reasoning, fell silent. After an interval the sun set in a film of yellow light; then the afterglow followed; and finally the stars pricked out the true immensity of the prairies.

"*He's* the feller hired to fight," observed the shadowy Billy, jerking his thumb backward.

The tenderfoot now understood the silent, grim man who, unapproachable and solitary, had alone occupied the seat on top of the stage. Looking with more curiosity, the tenderfoot observed a shot-gun with abnormally short barrels, slung in two brass clips along the back of the seat in front of the messenger. The usual revolvers, too, were secured, instead of by the regulation holsters, in brass clips riveted to the belt, so that in case of necessity they could be snatched free with one forward sweep of the arm. The man met his gaze keenly.

"Them Hills ain't fur now," vouchsafed Billy, as a cold breeze from the west lifted the limp brim of his hat, and a film of cloud drew with uncanny and silent rapidity across the stars.

The tenderfoot had turned again to look at the messenger, who interested him exceedingly, when the stage came to a stop so violent as almost to throw him from his seat. He recovered his balance with difficulty. Billy, his foot braced

against the brake, was engaged in leisurely winding the reins around it.

"Hands up, I say!" cried a sharp voice from the darkness ahead.

"Meanin' you," observed Billy to the tenderfoot, at the same time thrusting his own over his head and settling down comfortably on the small of his back. "Time!" he called, facetiously, to the darkness.

As though at the signal the night split with the roar of buckshot, and splintered with the answering crackle of a six-shooter three times repeated. The screech of the brake had deceived the messenger as to the whereabouts of the voice. He had jumped to the ground on the wrong side of the stage, thus finding himself without protection against his opponent, who, firing at the flash of the shot-gun, had brought him to the ground.

The road-agent stepped confidently forward. "Billy," said he, pleasantly, "jest pitch me that box."

Billy climbed over the seat and dropped a heavy, iron-bound case to the ground. "Danged if I thinks anybody *kin* git Buck, thar," he remarked, in thoughtful reference to the messenger.

"Now, drive on," commanded the road-agent.

Three hours later Billy and the sobered tenderfoot pulled into Deadwood. Ten minutes taught the camp what had occurred.

Now, it must be premised that Deadwood had recently chosen a sheriff. He did not look much like a sheriff, for he was small and weak and bald, and most childlike as to expression of countenance. But when I tell you that his name was Alfred, you will know that it was all right. To him the community looked for initiative. It expected him to organise a posse, which would, of course, consist of every man in the place not otherwise urgently employed, and to enter upon instant pursuit. He did not.

"How many is they?" he asked of Billy.

"One lonesome one," replied the stage-driver.

"I plays her a lone hand," announced Alfred.

You see, Alfred knew well enough his own defects. He never could make plans when anybody else was near, but always instinctively took the second place. Then, when the other's scheme had fallen into ruins, he would construct a most excellent expedient from the wreck of it. In the case under consideration he preferred to arrange his own campaign, and therefore to work alone.

By that time men knew Alfred. They made no objection.

"Snowin'," observed one of the chronic visitors of the saloon door. There are always two or three of such in every Western gathering.

"One of you boys saddle my bronc," suddenly requested Alfred, and began to examine his fire-arms by the light of the saloon lamp.

"Yo' ain't aimin' to set out to-night?" they asked, incredulously.

"I am. Th' snow will make a good trail, but she'll be covered come mornin'."

So Alfred set out alone, at night, in a snow-storm, without the guidance of a solitary star, to find a single point in the vastness of the prairie.

He made the three hours of Billy and the tenderfoot in a little over an hour, because it was mostly down hill. So the agent had apparently four hours the start of him, which discrepancy was cut down, however, by the time consumed in breaking open the strong-box after Billy and the stage had surely departed beyond gunshot. The exact spot was easily marked by the body of Buck, the express messenger. Alfred convinced himself that the man was dead, but did not waste further time on him: the boys would take care of the remains next day. He remounted and struck out sharp for the east, though, according to Billy's statement, the agent had turned north.

"He is alone," said Alfred to himself, "so he ain't in that Black Hank outfit. Ain't nothin' to take him north, an' if he goes south he has to hit way down through the South Fork trail, which same takes him two weeks. Th' greenbacks in that plunder is numbered, and old Wells-Fargo has th' numbers. He sure has to pike in an' change them bills afore he is spotted. So he goes to Pierre."

Alfred staked his all on this reasoning and rode blindly eastward. Fortunately the roll of the country was sufficiently definite to enable him to keep his general direction well enough until about three o'clock, when the snow ceased and the stars came out, together with the waning moon. Twenty minutes later he came to the bed of a stream.

"Up or down?" queried Alfred, thoughtfully. The state of the weather decided him. It had been blowing all night strongly from the northwest. Left without guidance a pony tends to edge more or less away from the wind, in order to turn tail to the weather. Alfred had diligently counteracted this tendency all night, but he doubted whether, in the hurry of flight, the fugitive had thought of it. Instead of keeping directly east toward Pierre, he had probably

fallen away more or less toward the south. "Down," Alfred decided.

He dismounted from his horse and began to lead the animal parallel to the stream, but about two hundred yards from it, first taking care to ascertain that a little water flowed in the channel. On discovering that there did, he nodded his head in a satisfied manner.

"He doesn't leave no trail till she begins to snow," he argued, "an' he nat'rally doesn't expect no mud-turkles like me a followin' of him eastward. *Consequently* he feeds when he strikes water. This yere is water."

All of which seemed satisfactory to Alfred. He walked on foot in order to discover the trail in the snow. He withdrew two hundred yards from the bank of the stream that his pony might not scent the other man's horse, and so give notice of approach by whinnying. After a time he came across the trail. So he left the pony and followed it to the creek-bottom on foot. At the top of the bluff he peered over cautiously.

"Well, you got nerve!" he remarked to himself. "If I was runnin' this yere game, I'd sure scout with my blinders off."

The fugitive evidently believed himself safe from pursuit, for he had made camp. His two

ponies cropped browse and pawed for grass in the bottom land. He himself had prepared a warm niche and was sleeping in it with only one blanket over him, though by now the thermometer was well down toward zero. The affair had been simple. He had built a long, hot fire in the L of an upright ledge and the ground. When ready to sleep he had raked the fire three feet out from the angle, and had lain down on the heated ground between the fire and the ledge. His rifle and revolver lay where he could seize them at a moment's notice.

Alfred could stalk a deer, but he knew better than to attempt to stalk a man trained in the West. Instead, he worked himself into a protected position and carefully planted a Winchester bullet some six inches from the man's ear. The man woke up suddenly and made an instinctive grab toward his weapons.

"Drop it!" yelled Alfred.

So he dropped it, and lay like a rabbit in its form.

"Jest select that thar six-shooter by the end of the bar'l and hurl her from you some," advised the sheriff. "Now the Win*ches*ter. Now stand up an' let's look at you." The man obeyed. "Yo' don't really need that other gun, under th'

circumstances," pursued the little man. "No, don't fetch her loose from the holster none; jest unbuckle th' whole outfit, belt and all. Good! Now, you freeze, and stay froze right whar you are."

So Alfred arose and scrambled down to the bottom.

"Good-mornin'," he observed, pleasantly.

He cast about him and discovered the man's lariat, which he picked up and overran with one hand until he had loosened the noose.

"You-all are some sizable," he remarked, in conversational tones, "an' like enough you eats me up, if I gets clost enough to tie you. Hands up!"

With a deft twist and flip he tossed the open noose over his prisoner's upheld wrists and jerked it tight.

"Thar you be," he observed, laying aside his rifle.

He loosened one of his revolvers suggestively and approached to tie the knot.

"Swing her down," he commanded. He contemplated the result. "Don't like that nohow—tied in front. Step through your hands a whole lot." The man hesitated. "Step, I say!" said Alfred, sharply, at the same time pricking the prisoner with his long knife.

The other contorted and twisted awkwardly, but finally managed to thrust first one foot, then the other, between his shackled wrists. Alfred bound together his elbows at the back.

"You'll do," he approved, cheerfully. "Now, we sees about grub."

Two flat stones placed a few inches apart improvised a stove when fire thrust its tongue from the crevice, and a frying-pan and tin-cup laid across the opening cooked the outlaw's provisions. Alfred hospitably ladled some bacon and coffee into their former owner.

"Not that I needs to," he observed, "but I'm jest that tender-hearted."

At the close of the meal, Alfred instituted a short and successful search for the plunder, which he found in the stranger's saddle-bag, open and unashamed.

"Yo're sure a tenderfoot at this game, stranger," commented the sheriff. "Thar is plenty abundance of spots to cache such plunder —like the linin' of yore saddle, or a holler horn. Has you any choice of cayuses for ridin'?" indicating the grazing ponies.

The man shook his head. He had maintained a lowering silence throughout all these cheerful proceedings.

Alfred and his prisoner finally mounted and rode northwest. As soon as they had scrambled up the precipitous side of the gully, the affair became a procession, with the stranger in front, and the stranger's second pony bringing up an obedient rear. Thus the robber was first to see a band of Sioux that topped a distant rise for a single instant. Of course, the Sioux saw him, too. He communicated this discovery to Alfred.

"Well," said Alfred, "they ain't hostile."

"These yere savages is plenty hostile," contradicted the stranger, "and don't you make no mistake thar. I jest nat'rally lifts that pinto offen them yisterday," and he jerked his thumb toward the black-and-white pony in the rear.

"And you camps!" cried Alfred, in pure astonishment. "You must be plumb locoed!"

"I ain't had no sleep in three nights," explained the other, in apology.

Alfred's opinion of the man rose at once.

"Yo' has plumb nerve to tackle a hold-up under them circumstances," he observed.

"I sets out to git that thar stage; and I gits her," replied the agent, doggedly.

The savages appeared on the next rise, barely a half-mile away, and headed straight for the two men.

"I reckon yere's where you takes a hand," remarked Alfred simply, and, riding alongside, he released the other's arms by a single slash of his knife. The man slipped from his horse and stretched his arms wide apart and up over his head in order to loosen his muscles. Alfred likewise dismounted. The two, without further parley, tied their horses' noses close to their front fetlocks, and sat down back to back on the surface of the prairie. Each was armed with one of the new 44-40 Winchesters, just out, and with a brace of Colt's revolvers, chambering the same-sized cartridge as the rifle.

"How you heeled?" inquired Alfred.

The stranger took stock.

"Fifty-two," he replied.

"Seventy for me," vouchsafed Alfred. "I goes plenty organised."

Each man spread a little semicircle of shells in front of him. At the command of the two, without reloading, were forty-eight shots.

When the Indians had approached to within about four hundred yards of the white men they paused. Alfred rose and held his hand toward them, palm outward, in the peace sign. His response was a shot and a chorus of yells.

"I tells you," commented the hold-up.

Alfred came back and sat down. The savages, one by one, broke away from the group and began to circle rapidly to the left in a constantly contracting spiral. They did a great deal of yelling. Occasionally they would shoot. To the latter feature the plainsmen lent an attentive ear, for to their trained senses each class of arm spoke with a different voice—the old muzzle-loader, the Remington, the long, heavy Sharp's 50, each proclaimed itself plainly. The mere bullets did not interest them in the least. Two men seated on the ground presented but a small mark to the Indians shooting uncleaned weapons from running horses at three or four hundred yards' range.

"That outfit is rank outsiders," concluded Alfred. "They ain't over a dozen britch-loaders in the layout."

"Betcher anything you say I drops one," offered the stranger, taking a knee-rest.

"Don't be so plumb fancy," advised Alfred, "but turn in and help."

He was satisfied with the present state of affairs, and was hacking at the frozen ground with his knife. The light snow on the ridge-tops had been almost entirely drifted away. The stranger obeyed.

On seeing the men thus employed, the Indians turned their horses directly toward the group and charged in. At the range of perhaps two hundred yards the Winchesters began to speak. Alfred fired twice and the stranger three times. Then the circle broke and divided and passed by, leaving an oval of untrodden ground.

"How many did you get?" inquired Alfred, with professional interest.

"Two," replied the man.

"Two here," supplemented Alfred.

A commotion, a squeal, a thrashing-about near at hand caused both to turn suddenly. The pinto pony was down and kicking. Alfred walked over and stuck him in the throat to save a cartridge.

"Move up, pardner," said he.

The other moved up. Thus the men became possessed of protection from one side. The Indians had vented a yell of rage when the pony had dropped. Now as each warrior approached a certain point in the circle, he threw his horse back on its haunches, so that in a short time the entire band was once more gathered in a group. Alfred and the outlaw knew that this manœuvre portended a more serious charge than the impromptu affair they had broken with such com-

parative ease. An Indian is extremely gregarious when it comes to open fighting. He gets a lot of encouragement out of yells, the patter of many ponies' hoofs, and the flutter of an abundance of feathers. Running in from the circumference of a circle is a bit too individual to suit his taste.

Also, the savages had by now taken the measure of their white opponents. They knew they had to deal with experience. Suspicion of this must have been aroused by the practised manner in which the men had hobbled their horses and had assumed the easiest posture of defence. The idea would have gained strength from their superior marksmanship; but it would have become absolute certainty from the small detail that, in all this hurl and rush of excitement, they had fired but five shots, and those at close range. It is difficult to refrain from banging away for general results when so many marks so loudly present themselves. It is equally fatal to do so. A few misses are a great encouragement to a savage, and seem to breed their like in subsequent shooting. They destroy your own coolness and confidence, and they excite the enemy an inch nearer to that dead-line of the lust of fighting, beyond which prudence gives place to the fury

of killing. An Indian is the most cautious and wily of fighters before he goes mad: and the most terribly reckless after. In a few moments four of their number had passed to the happy hunting-grounds, and they were left, no nearer their prey, to contemplate the fact.

The tornado moved. It swept at the top jump of ponies used to the chase of the buffalo, as sudden and terrible and imminent as the loom of a black cloud on the wings of storm, and, like it, seeming to gather speed and awfulness as it rushed nearer. Each rider bent low over his pony's neck and shot—a hail of bullets, which, while most passed too high, nevertheless shrieked and spun through the volume of coarser sound. The ponies stretched their necks and opened their red mouths and made their little feet go with a rapidity that twinkled as bewilderingly as a picket-fence passing a train. And the light snow swirled and eddied behind them.

The two men behind the dead horse were not deceived by this excitement into rising to their knees. They realised that this was the critical point in the fight, and they shot hard and fast, concentrating all the energy of their souls into the steady glare of their eyes over the sights of the smoking rifles. In a moment the foremost

warrior was trying to leap his pony at the barrier before him, but the little animal refused the strange jump and shied to the left, cannoning and plunging into the stream of braves rushing in on that side. Into the confusion Alfred emptied the last two shots of his Winchester, and was fortunate enough merely to cripple a pony with one of them. The kicking, screaming, little beast interposed a momentary but effective barrier between the sheriff and his foes. A rattling fire from one of his six-shooters into the brown of the hesitating charge broke it. The self-induced excitement ebbed, and the Indians swerved and swept on by.

On the other side, the outlaw had also managed to kill a pony within a few feet of the impromptu breastwork, and, direct riding-down being thus prevented in front, he was lying stretched on his side, coolly letting off first one revolver then the other in the face of imminent ruin. Alfred's attentions, however, and the defection of the right wing, drove these savages, too, into flight. Miraculously, neither man was more than scratched, though their clothes and the ground about them showed the marks of bullets. Strangely enough, too, the outlaw's other pony stood unhurt at a little distance whither the rush

of the charge had carried him. Alfred arose and drove him back. Then both men made a triangular breastwork of the two dead horses and their saddles.

"Cyan't do that more'n once," observed the outlaw, taking a long breath.

"They don't want her more'n once," replied Alfred, sagely.

The men tried to take score. This was not easy. Out of the hundred and twelve cartridges with which they had started the fight, there remained sixty-eight. That meant they had expended thirty-nine in the last charge alone. As near as they could make out, they had accounted for eight of the enemy, four in the mêlée just finished. Besides, there were a number of ponies down. At first glance this might seem like poor shooting. It was not. A rapidly moving figure is a difficult rifle-mark with the best of conditions. In this case the conditions would have rendered an Easterner incapable of hitting a feather pillow at three yards.

And now began the most terrible part of this terrible day. A dozen of the warriors dismounted, made a short circle to the left, and disappeared in a thin growth of dried grasses, old mulliens, and stunted, scattered brush barely six

inches high. There seemed hardly cover enough to hide a man, and yet the dozen were as completely swallowed up as though they had plunged beneath the waters of the sea. Only occasionally the top of a grass tuft or a greasewood shivered. It became the duty of Alfred and his companion to shoot suddenly and accurately at these motions. This was necessary in order to discourage the steady concealed advance of the dozen, who, when they had approached to within as few yards as their god of war would permit, purposed to rush in and finish their opponents out of hand. And that rush could never be stopped. The white men knew it perfectly well, so they set conscientiously to work with their handful of cartridges to convince the reds that it is not healthy to crawl along ridge-tops on an autumn day. Sundry outlying Indians, with ammunition to waste, took belly and knee rests and strengthened the thesis to the contrary.

The brisk fighting had warmed the contestants' blood. Now a cold wind penetrated through their woollens to the goose-flesh. It was impossible to judge of the effect of the shots, but both knew that the accuracy of their shooting was falling off. Clench his teeth as he would, hold his breath as steadfastly as he might, Alfred could

not accomplish that steady, purposeful, unblinking pressure on the trigger so necessary to accuracy. In spite of himself, the rifle jerked ever so little to the right during the fall of the hammer. Soon he adopted the expedient of pulling it suddenly which is brilliant but uncertain. The ground was very cold. Before long both men would have felt inclined to risk everything for the sake of a little blood-stimulating tramp back and forth. The danger did not deter them. Only the plainsman's ingrained horror of throwing away a chance held them, shivering pitiably, to their places.

Still they managed to keep the dozen at a wary distance, and even, they suspected, to hit some. This was the Indians' game—to watch; to wait; to lie with infinite patience; to hitch nearer a yard, a foot, an inch even; and then to seize with the swiftness of the eagle's swoop an opportunity which the smallest imprudence, fruit of weariness, might offer. One by one the precious cartridges spit, and fell from the breech-blocks empty and useless. And still the tufts of grass wavered a little nearer.

"I wish t' hell, stranger, you-all hadn't edged off south," chattered Alfred. "We'd be nearer th' Pierre trail."

"I'm puttin' in my spare wishin' on them Injins," shivered the other; "I sure hopes they aims to make a break pretty quick; I'm near froze."

About two o'clock the sun came out and the wind died. Though its rays were feeble at that time of year, their contrast with the bleakness that had prevailed during the morning threw a perceptible warmth into the crouching men. Alfred succeeded, too, in wriggling a morsel of raw bacon from the pack, which the two men shared. But the cartridges were running very low.

"We establishes a dead-line," suggested Alfred. "S' long as they slinks beyond yonder greasewood, they lurks in safety. Plug 'em this side of her."

"C'rrect," agreed the stranger.

This brought them a season of comparative quiet. They even made out to smoke, and so were happy. Over near the hill the body of Indians had gone into camp and were taking it easy. The job of wiping out these troublesome whites had been sublet, and they wasted no further anxiety over the affair. This indifference irritated the outlaw exceedingly.

"Damn siwashes!" he grumbled.

"Look out!" warned Alfred.

The dead-line was overpassed. Swaying tufts of vegetation marked the rapid passage of eel-like bodies. The Indians had decided on an advance, being encouraged probably by the latter inaccuracy of the plainsmen's fire. Besides, the day was waning. It was no cat-and-mouse game now; but a rush, like the other except that all but the last twenty or thirty yards would be made under cover. The besieged turned their attention to it. Over on the hill the bucks had arisen from their little fires of buffalo chips, and were watching. On the summit of the farther ridge rode silhouetted sentinels.

Alfred selected a tuft and fired just ahead of it. A *crack* at his side indicated that the stranger, too, had gone to work. It was a discouraging and nervous business. The shooter could never tell whether or not he had hit. The only thing he was sure of was that the line was wriggling nearer and nearer. He felt something as though he were shooting at a man with blank cartridges. This test of nerve was probably the most severe of the fight.

But it was successfully withstood. Alfred felt a degree of steadiness return to him with the excitement and the change of weather. The Winchester spat as carefully as before. Suddenly it

could no longer be doubted that the line was beginning to hesitate. The outlaw saw it, too.

"Give it to 'em good!" he cried.

Both men shot, and then again.

The line wavered.

"Two more shots will stop 'em!" cried the road-agent, and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked against an empty chamber.

"I'm done!" he cried, hopelessly. His cartridges were gone.

Alfred laid his own Winchester on the ground, turned over on his back, and puffed a cloud of smoke straight up toward the sky.

"Me, too," said he.

The cessation of the shooting had put an end to the Indians' uncertainty. Another moment would bring them knowledge of the state of affairs.

"Don't get much outen my scalp, anyway," said Alfred, uncovering his bald head.

The sentinel on the distant ridge was riding his pony in short-looped circles and waving a blanket in a peculiar way above his head. From the grass nine Indians arose, stooped, and scuttled off like a covey of running quail. Over by the fires warriors were leaping on their ponies, and some were leading other ponies in the direc-

tion of the nine. An air of furtive but urgent haste characterised all these movements. Alfred lent an attentive ear.

"Seems a whole lot like a rescue," he remarked, quietly. "I reckon th' boys been followin' of my trail."

The stranger paused in the act of unhobbling the one remaining pony. In the distance, faintly, could be heard cheers and shots intended as encouragement.

"They's comin' on th' jump," said Alfred.

By this time the stranger had unfastened the horse.

"I reckon we quits," said he, mounting; "I jest nat'rally takes this bronc, because I needs him more'n you do. So long. I may 's well confide that I'm feelin' some glad jest now that them Injins comes along."

And then his pony fell in a heap, and began to kick up dirt and to snort blood.

"I got another, so you just subside a lot," commanded Alfred, recocking his six-shooter.

The stranger lay staring at him in astonishment.

"Thought you was busted on catridges!" he cried.

"You-all may as well know," snapped Alfred,

"that 's long as I'm an officer of this yere district, I'm a sheriff first and an Injin-fighter afterward."

"What the hell!" wondered the road-agent, still in a daze.

"Them's th' two catridges that would have stopped 'em," said Alfred.

IV

THE RACE

This story is most blood-and-thundery, but, then, it is true. It is one of the stories of Alfred; but Alfred is not the hero of it at all—quite another man, not nearly so interesting in himself as Alfred.

At the time, Alfred and this other man, whose name was Tom, were convoying a band of Mexican vaqueros over to the Circle-X outfit. The Circle-X was in the heat of a big round-up, and had run short of men. So Tom and Alfred had gone over to Tucson and picked up the best they could find, which best was enough to bring tears to the eyes of an old-fashioned, straight-riding, swift-roping Texas cowman. The gang was an ugly one: it was sullen, black-browed, sinister. But it, one and all, could throw a rope and cut out stock, which was not only the main thing—it was the whole thing.

Still, the game was not pleasant. Either Al-

fred or Tom usually rode night-herd on the ponies—merely as a matter of precaution—and they felt just a trifle more shut off by themselves and alone than if they had ridden solitary over the limitless alkali of the Arizona plains. This feeling struck in the deeper because Tom had just entered one of his brooding spells. Tom and Alfred had been chums now for close on two years, so Alfred knew enough to leave him entirely alone until he should recover.

The primary cause of Tom's abstraction was an open-air preacher, and the secondary cause was, of course, a love affair. These two things did not connect themselves consciously in Tom's mind, but they blended subtly to produce a ruminative dissatisfaction.

When Tom was quite young he had fallen in love with a girl back in the Dakota country. Shortly after a military-post had been established near by, and Anne Bingham had ceased to be spoken of by mayors' daughters and officers' wives. Tom, being young, had never quite gotten over it. It was still part of his nature, and went with a certain sort of sunset, or that kind of star-lit evening in which an imperceptible haze dims the brightness of the heavens.

The open-air preacher had chosen as his text

the words, "passing the love of woman," and Tom, wandering idly by, had caught the text. Somehow ever since the words had run in his mind. They did not mean anything to him, but merely repeated themselves over and over, just as so many delicious syllables which tickled the ear and rolled succulently under the tongue. For, you see, Tom was only an ordinary battered Arizona cow-puncher, and so, of course, according to the fireside moralists, quite incapable of the higher feelings. But the words reacted to arouse memories of black-eyed Anne, and the memories in turn brought one of his moods.

Tom, and Alfred, and the ponies, and the cook-wagon, and the cook, and the Mexican vaqueros had done the alkali for three days. Underfoot had been an exceedingly irregular plain; overhead an exceedingly bright and trying polished sky; around about an exceedingly monotonous horizon-line and dense clouds of white dust. At the end of the third day everybody was feeling just a bit choked up and tired, and, to crown a series of petty misfortunes, the fire failed to respond to Black Sam's endeavours. This made supper late.

Now at one time in this particular locality Arizona had not been dry and full of alkali. A

mighty river, so mighty that in its rolling flood no animal that lives to-day would have had the slightest chance, surged down from the sharp-pointed mountains on the north, pushed fiercely its way through the southern plains, and finally seethed and boiled in eddies of foam out into a southern sea which has long since disappeared. On its banks grew strange, bulbous plants. Across its waters swam uncouth monsters with snake-like necks. Over it alternated storms so savage that they seemed to rend the world, and sunshine so hot that it seemed that were it not for the bulbous plants all living things would perish as in an oven.

In the course of time conditions changed, and the change brought the Arizona of to-day. There are now no turbid waters, no bulbous plants, no uncouth beasts, and, above all, no storms. Only the sun and one other thing remain: that other thing is the bed of the ancient stream.

On one side—the concave of the curve—is a long easy slope, so gradual that one hardly realises where it shades into the river-bottom itself. On the other—the convex of the curve—where the swift waters were turned aside to a new direction, is a high, perpendicular cliff running

in an almost unbroken breastwork for a great many miles, and baked as hard as iron in this sunny and almost rainless climate. Occasional showers have here and there started to eat out little transverse gullies, but with a few exceptions have only gone so far as slightly to nick the crest. The exceptions, reaching to the plain, afford steep and perilous ascents to the level above. Anyone who wishes to pass the barrier made by the primeval river must hunt out for himself one of these narrow passages.

On the evening in question the cowmen had made camp in the hollow beyond the easy slope. On the rise, sharply silhouetted against the west, Alfred rode wrangler to the little herd of ponies. Still farther westward across the plain was the clay-cliff barrier, looking under the sunset like a narrow black ribbon. In the hollow itself was the camp, giving impression in the background of a scattering of ghostly mules, a half-circle of wagons, ill-defined forms of recumbent vaqueros, and then in the foreground of Sam with his gleaming semicircle of utensils, and his pathetic little pile of fuel which would not be induced to gleam at all.

For, as has been said, Black Sam was having great trouble with his fire. It went out at least

six times, and yet each time it hung on in a flickering fashion so long that he had felt encouraged to arrange his utensils and distribute his provisions. Then it had expired, and poor Sam had to begin all over again. The Mexicans smoked yellow-paper cigarettes and watched his off-and-on movements with sullen distrust; they were firmly convinced that he was indulging in some sort of a practical joke. So they hated him fervently and wrapped themselves in their serapes. Tom sat on a wagon-tongue swinging a foot and repeating vaguely to himself in a singsong inner voice, "passing the love of woman, passing the love of woman," over and over again. His mind was a dull blank of grayness. From time to time he glanced at Sam, but with no impatience: he was used to going without. Sam was to him a matter of utter indifference.

As to the cook himself, he had a perplexed droop in every curve of his rounded shoulders. His kinky gray wool was tousled from perpetual undecided scratching, and his eyes had something of the dumb sadness of the dog as he rolled them up in despair. Life was not a matter of indifference to him. Quite the contrary. The problem of *damp wood + matches = cooking-fire* was the whole tangle of existence. There

was something pitiable in it. Perhaps this was because there is something more pathetic in a comical face grown solemn than in the most melancholy countenance in the world.

At last the moon rose and the fire decided to burn. With the seventh attempt it flared energetically; then settled to a steady glow of possible flap-jacks.

But its smoke was bitter, and the evening wind fitful. Bitter smoke on an empty stomach might be appropriately substituted for the last straw of the proverb—when the proverb has to do with hungry Mexicans. Most of the recumbent vaqueros merely cursed a little deeper and drew their serapes closer, but José Guiterrez grunted, threw off his blanket, and approached the fire.

Sam rolled the whites of his eyes up at him for a moment, grinned in a half-perplexed fashion, and turned again to his pots and pans. José, being sulky and childish, wanted to do something to somebody, so he insolently flicked the end of his long quirt through a mess of choice but still chaotic flap-jacks. The quirt left a narrow streak across the batter. Sam looked up quickly.

"Doan you done do dat!" he said, with indignation.

He looked upon the turkey-like José for a

heavy moment, and then turned back to the cooking. In rescuing an unstable coffee-pot a moment later, he accidentally jostled against José's leg. José promptly and fiercely kicked the whole outfit into space. The frying-pan crowned a sage-brush; the coffee-pot rolled into a hollow, where it spouted coffee-grounds and water in a diminishing stream; the kettle rolled gently on its side; flap-jacks distributed themselves impartially and moistly; and, worst of all, the fire was drowned out altogether.

Black Sam began stiffly to arise. The next instant he sank back with a gurgle in his throat and a knife thrust in his side.

The murderer stood looking down at his victim. The other Mexicans stared. The cowboy jumped up from the tongue of the wagon, drew his weapon from the holster at his side, took deliberate aim, and fired twice. Then he turned and began to run toward Alfred on the hill.

A cowboy cannot run so very rapidly. He carries such a quantity of dunnage below in the shape of high boots, spurs, chaps, and cartridge-belts that his gait is a waddling single-foot. Still, Tom managed to get across the little stony ravine before the Mexicans recovered from their surprise and became disentangled from their

ponchos. Then he glanced over his shoulder. He saw that some of the vaqueros were running toward the arroya, that some were busily unhobbling the mules, and that one or two had kneeled and were preparing to shoot. At the sight of these last, he began to jump from side to side as he ran. This decreased his speed. Half-way up the hill he was met by Alfred on his way to get in the game, whatever it might prove to be. The little man reached over and grasped Tom's hand. Tom braced his foot against the stirrup, and in an instant was astride behind the saddle. Alfred turned up the hill again, and without a word began applying his quirt vigorously to the wiry shoulders of his horse. At the top of the hill, as they passed the grazing ponies, Tom turned and emptied the remaining four chambers of his revolver into the herd. Two ponies fell kicking; the rest scattered in every direction. Alfred grunted approvingly, for this made pursuit more difficult, and so gained them a little more time.

Now both Alfred and Tom knew well enough that a horse carrying two men cannot run away from a horse carrying one man, but they also knew the country, and this knowledge taught them that if they could reach the narrow passage

through the old clay bluff, they might be able to escape to Peterson's, which was situated a number of miles beyond. This would be possible, because men climb faster when danger is behind them than when it is in front. Besides, a brisk defence could render even an angry Mexican a little doubtful as to just when he should begin to climb. Accordingly, Alfred urged the pony across the flat plain of the ancient riverbed toward the nearest and only break in the cliff. Fifteen miles below was the regular passage. Otherwise the upper mesa was as impregnable as an ancient fortress. The Mexicans had by this time succeeded in roping some of the scattered animals, and were streaming over the brow of the hill, shouting wildly. Alfred looked back and grinned. Tom waved his wide sombrero mockingly.

When they approached the ravine, they found the sides almost perpendicular and nearly bare. Its bed was V-shaped, and so cut up with miniature gullies, fantastic turrets and spires, and so undermined by former rains as to be almost impassable. It sloped gently at first, but afterward more rapidly, and near the top was straight up and down for two feet or more. As the men reached it, they threw themselves from the horse

and commenced to scramble up, leading the animal by the bridle-rein. From riding against the sunset their eyes were dazzled, so this was not easy. The horse followed gingerly, his nose close to the ground.

It is well known that quick, short rains followed by a burning sun tend to undermine the clay surface of the ground and to leave it with a hard upper shell, beneath which are cavities of various depths. Alfred and Tom, as experienced men, should have foreseen this, but they did not. Soon after entering the ravine the horse broke through into one of the underground cavities and fell heavily on his side. When he had scrambled somehow to his feet, he stood feebly panting, his nostrils expanded.

"How is it, Tom?" called Alfred, who was ahead.

"Shoulder out," said Tom, briefly.

Alfred turned back without another word, and putting the muzzle of his pistol against the pony's forehead just above the line of the eyes he pulled the trigger. With the body the two men improvised a breastwork across a little hummock. Just as they dropped behind it the Mexicans clattered up, riding bareback. Tom coolly reloaded his pistol.

The Mexicans, too, were dazzled from riding against the glow in the west, and halted a moment in a confused mass at the mouth of the ravine. The two cowboys within rose and shot rapidly. Three Mexicans and two ponies fell. The rest in wild confusion slipped rapidly to the right and left beyond the Americans' line of sight. Three armed with Winchesters made a long detour and dropped quietly into the sagebrush just beyond accurate pistol-range. There they lay concealed, watching. Then utter silence fell.

The rising moon shone full and square into the ravine, illuminating every inch of the ascent. A very poor shot could hardly miss in such a light and with such a background. The two cowmen realised this and settled down more comfortably behind their breastwork. Tom cautiously raised the pony's head with a little chunk of rock, thus making a loophole through which to keep tab on the enemy, after which he rolled on his belly and began whittling in the hard clay, for Tom had the carving habit—like many a younger boy. Alfred carefully extracted a short pipe from beneath his chaparejos, pushed down with his blunt forefinger the charge with which it was already loaded, and struck a match. He poised this for a moment above the bowl of the pipe.

"What's the row anyway?" he inquired, with pardonable curiosity.

"Now, it's jest fifteen mile to th' cut," said Tom, disregarding Alfred's question entirely, "an' of co'se they's goin' to send a posse down thar on th' keen jump. That'll take clost onto three hours in this light. Then they'll jest pot us a lot from on top."

Alfred puffed three times toward the moonlight, and looked as though the thing were sufficiently obvious without wasting so much breath over it.

"We've jest *got* to git out!" concluded Tom, earnestly.

Alfred grunted.

"An' how are we goin' to do it?"

Alfred paused in the act of blowing a cloud.

"Because, if we makes a break, those Greasers jest nat'rally plugs us from behind th' minute we begins to climb."

Alfred condescended to nod. Tom suspended his whittling for a reply.

"Well," said Alfred, taking his pipe from his mouth—Tom contentedly took up whittling again—"there's only one way to do it, and that's to keep them so damn busy in front that they *can't* plug us."

Tom looked perplexed.

"We just got to take our chances on the climbing. Of course, there's bound to be th' risk of accident. But when I give th' word, *you mosey*, and if one of them pots you, it'll be because my six-shooter's empty."

"But you can't expec' t' shoot *an'* climb!" objected Tom.

"Course not," replied Alfred, calmly. "Division of labour: you climb; I shoot."

A light dawned in Tom's eyes, and he shut his jaws with a snap.

"I guess not!" said he, quietly.

"Yo' laigs is longer," Alfred urged, in his gentle voice, "and yo'll get to Peterson's quicker;" and then he looked in Tom's eyes and changed his tone. "All right!" he said, in a business-like manner. "I'll toss you for it."

For reply, Tom fished out an old pack of cards.

"I tell you," he proposed, triumphantly, "I'll turn you fer it. First man that gits a jack in th' hand-out stays."

He began to manipulate the cards, lying cramped on his side, and in doing so dropped two or three. Alfred turned to pick them up. Tom deftly slipped the jack of diamonds to the bottom

of the pack. He inserted in the centre those Alfred handed him, and began at once to deal.

"Thar's yore's," he said, laying out the four of clubs, "an' yere's mine," he concluded, producing the jack of diamonds. "Luck's ag'in me early in th' game," was his cheerful comment.

For a minute Alfred was silent, and a decided objection appeared in his eyes. Then his instinct of fair play in the game took the ascendant. He kicked off his chaps in the most business-like manner, unbuckled his six-shooter and gave it to Tom, and perched his hat on the end of his quirt, which he then raised slowly above the pony's side for the purpose of drawing the enemy's fire. He did these things quickly and without heroics, because he was a plainsman. Hardly had the bullets from three Winchesters spatted against the clay before he was up and climbing for dear life.

The Mexicans rushed to the opening from either side, fully expecting to be able either to take wing-shots at close range, or to climb so fast as to close in before the cowboys would have time to make a stand at the top. In this they shut off their most effective fire—that of the three men with the Winchesters—and, instead of getting wing-shots themselves, they received an enthusi-

astic battering from Tom at the range of six yards. Even a tenderfoot cannot over-shoot at six yards. What was left of the Mexicans disappeared quicker than they had come, and the three of the Winchesters scuttled back to cover like a spent covey of quail.

Tom then lit Alfred's pipe, and continued his excellent sculpture in the bed of hard clay. He knew nothing more would happen until the posse came. The game had passed out of his hands. It had become a race between a short-legged man on foot and a band of hard riders on the backs of very good horses. Viewing the matter dispassionately, Tom would not have cared to bet on the chances.

As has been stated, Alfred was a small man and his legs were short—and not only short, but unused to exertion of any kind, for Alfred's daylight hours were spent on a horse. At the end of said legs were tight boots with high French heels, which most Easterners would have considered a silly affectation, but which all Westerners knew to be purposeful in the extreme—they kept his feet from slipping forward through the wide stirrups. In other respects, too, Alfred was handicapped. His shoulders were narrow and sloping and his chest was flat. Indoors and back

East he would probably have been a consumptive; out here, he was merely short-winded.

So it happened that Alfred lost the race.

The wonder was not that he lost, but that he succeeded in finishing at Peterson's at all. He did it somehow, and even made a good effort to ride back with the rescuing party, but fell like a log when he tried to pick up his hat. So someone took off his boots, also, and put him to bed.

As to the rescuing party, it disbanded less than an hour later. Immediately afterward it reorganized into a hunting party—and its game was men. The hunt was a long one, and the game was bagged even unto the last, but that is neither here nor there.

Poor Tom was found stripped to the hide, and hacked to pieces. Mexicans are impulsive, especially after a few of them have been killed. His equipment had been stolen. The naked horse and the naked man, bathed in the light of a gray dawn, that was all—except that here and there fluttered bits of paper that had once been a pack of cards. The clay slab was carved deeply—a man can do much of that sort of thing with two hours to waste. Most of the decorative effects were arrows, or hearts, or brands, but in one corner were the words, "passing the love of woman,"

which was a little impressive after all, even though Tom had not meant them, being, as I said, only an ordinary battered Arizona cow-puncher incapable of the higher feelings.

How do I know he played the jack of diamonds on purpose? Why, I knew Tom, and that's enough.

V

THE SAVING GRACE

Once upon a time there was an editor of a magazine who had certain ideas concerning short stories. This is not wonderful, for editors have such ideas; and when they find a short story which corresponds, they accept it with joy and pay good sums for it. This particular editor believed that a short story should be realistic. "Let us have things as they *are!*" he was accustomed to cry to his best friend, or the printer's devil, or the office cat, whichever happened to be the handiest. "Life is great enough to say things for itself, without having to be helped out by the mawkish sentimentality of an idiot! Permit us to see actual people, living actual lives, in actual houses, and I should hope we have common-sense enough to draw our own morals!" He usually made these chaotic exclamations after reading through several pages of very neat manuscript in which the sentences were long and involved, and in which

were employed polysyllabic adjectives of a poetic connotation. This editor liked short, crisp sentences. He wanted his adjectives served hot. He despised poetic connotation. Being only an editor, his name was Brown. If he had been a writer, he would have had three names, beginning with successive letters of the alphabet.

Now, one day, it happened that there appeared before this editor, Brown, a young man bearing a roll of manuscript. How he had gotten by the office boy Brown could not conceive, and rolled manuscript usually gave him spasms. The youth, however, presented a letter of introduction from Brown's best friend. He said he had a story to submit, and he said it with a certain appearance of breathlessness at the end of the sentence, which showed Brown that it was his first story. Brown frowned inwardly, and smiled outwardly. He begged the youth to take a seat. As all the seats were filled with unopened papers and unbound books, the youth said he preferred to stand.

Brown asked the youth questions, in a perfunctory manner, not because he cared to know anything about him, but because he liked the man who had written the letter. The youth's name proved to be Severne, and he was the most

serious-minded youth who had ever stepped from college into writing. He spoke of ideals. Brown concluded that the youth's story probably dealt with the time of the Chaldæan astronomers, and contained a deep symbolical truth, couched in language of the school of Bulwer Lytton or Marie Corelli. So, after the youth had gone, he seized the roll of manuscript, for the purpose of glancing through it. If he had imagined the story of any merit, he would not have been in such haste; but as his best friend had introduced the writer, he thought he would like to get a disagreeable task over at once.

He glanced the story through. Then he read it carefully. Then he slammed it down hard on his desk—to the vast confusion of some hundreds of loose memoranda, which didn't matter much, anyway—and uttered a big, bad word. The sentences in the story were short and crisp. The adjectives were served very hot indeed. There was not a single bit of poetic connotation. It described life as it really was.

Brown, the editor, published the story, and paid a good price for it. Severne, the author, wrote more stories, and sold them to Brown. The two men got to be very good friends, and Severne heard exactly how Brown liked short stories and

why, and how his, Severne's, stories were just that kind.

All this would have been quite an ideal condition of affairs, and an object-lesson to a harsh world and other editors, were it not that Severne was serious-minded. He had absolutely no sense of humour. Perspectives there were none for him, and due proportions did not exist. He took life hard. He looked upon himself gravely as a serious proposition, like the Nebular Hypothesis or Phonetic Reform. The immediate consequence was that, having achieved his success through realism, he placed realism on a pedestal and worshipped it as the only true (literary) god. Severne became a realist of realists. He ran it into the ground. He would not describe a single incident that he had not viewed from start to finish with his own eyes. He did not have much to do with feelings *direct,* but such as were necessary to his story he insisted on experiencing in his own person; otherwise the story remained unwritten. And as for emotions—such as anger, or religion, or fear—he would attempt none whose savour he had not tasted for himself. Unkind and envious rivals—not realists—insisted that once Severne had deliberately gotten very drunk on Bowery whiskey in order that he might

describe the sensations of one of his minor characters in such a condition. Certain it is, he soon gained the reputation among the unintelligent of being a crazy individual, who paid people remarkably well to do strange and meaningless things for him. He was always experimenting on himself and others.

This was ridiculous enough, but it would hardly have affected anyone but crusty old cranks who delight in talking about "young fools," were it not for the fact that Severne was in love. And that brings us to the point of our story.

Of course he was in love in a most serious-minded fashion. He did not get much fun out of it. He brooded most of the time over lovers' duties to each other and mankind. He had likewise an exalted conception of the sacred, holy, and lofty character of love itself. This is commendable, but handicaps a man seriously. Girls do not care for that kind of love as a steady thing. Far be it from me to insinuate that those quite angelic creatures ever actually want to be kissed; but if, by any purely *accidental* chance, circumstances bring it about that, without their consent or suspicion, a brute of a man *might* surprise them awfully—well, said brute does not gain

much by not springing the surprise. Being adored on a pedestal is nice—in public. So you must see that Severne's status in ordinary circumstances would be precarious. Conceive his fearful despair at finding his heart irrevocably committed to a young lady as serious-minded as himself, equally lacking in humour, and devoted mind and soul to the romantic or idealistic school of fiction! They often discussed the point seriously and heatedly. Each tried conscientiously to convert the other. As usual, the attempt, after a dozen protracted interviews, ended in the girl's losing her temper. This made Severne angry. Girls are so unreasonable!

"What do you suppose I care how your foolish imaginary people brush their teeth and button their suspenders and black their boots? I know how old man Smith opposite does, and that is more than enough for me!" she cried.

"The insight into human nature expresses itself thus," he argued, gloomily.

"Rubbish!" she rejoined. "The idea of a man's wasting the talents heaven has given him in describing as minutely and accurately as he can all the nasty, little, petty occurrences of everyday life! It is sordid!"

"The beautiful shines through the dreariness,

as it does in the real life people live," he objected, stubbornly.

"The beautiful is in the imagination," she cried, with some heat; "and the imagination is God-given; it is the only direct manifestation of the divine on earth. Without imagination no writing can have life."

As this bordered on sentiment, abhorred of realism, Severne muttered something that sounded like "fiddlesticks." They discussed the relation of imagination to literature on this latter basis. At the conclusion of the discussion, Miss Melville, for that was her name, delivered the following ultimatum:

"Well, I tell you right now, Robert Severne, that I'll never marry a man who has not more soul in him than that. I am very much disappointed in you. I had thought you possessed of more nobility of character!"

"Don't say that, Lucy," he begged, in genuine alarm. Serious-minded youths never know enough not to believe what a girl says.

"I will say that, and I mean it! I never want to see you again!"

"Does that mean that our engagement is broken?" he stammered, not daring to believe his ears.

"I should think, sir, that a stronger hint would be unnecessary."

He bowed his head miserably. "Isn't there anything I can do, Lucy? I don't want to be sent off like this. I *do* love you!"

She considered. "Yes, there is," she said, after a moment. "You can write a romantic story and publish it in a magazine. Then, and not until then, will I forgive you."

She turned coldly, and began to examine a photograph on the mantelpiece. After an apparently interminable period, receiving no reply, she turned sharply.

"Well!" she demanded.

Now, in the interval, Severne had been engaged in building a hasty but interesting mental pose. He had recalled to mind numerous historical and fictitious instances in which the man has been tempted by the woman to depart from his heaven-born principles. In some of these instances, when the woman had tempted successfully, the man had dwelt thenceforth in misery and died in torment, amid the execrations of mankind. In others, having resisted the siren, he had glowed with a high and exalted happiness, and finally had ascended to upper regions between applauding ranks of angels—which was not

realism in the least. Art, said Severne to himself, is an enduring truth. Human passions are misleading. Self-sacrifice is noble. He resolved on the spot to become a martyr to his art.

"I will never do it!" he answered, and stalked majestically from the room.

Severne took his trouble henceforward in a becomingly serious-minded manner. For many years he was about to live shrouded in gloom—a gloom in whose twilight could be dimly discerned the shattered wreck of his life. After a long period, from the *débris* of said wreck, he would build the structure of a great literary work of art, which all mankind would look upon with awe, but which he, standing apart, would eye with indifference, all joy being stricken dead by his memories of the past. But that was in the future. Just now he was in the gloom business. So, being a wealthy youth, he decided to go far, far away. This was necessary in order that he might bury his grief.

He rather fancied battle-fields and carnage, but there were no wars. It would add to the picture if he could return bronzed and battle-scarred, but as that was impossible, he resolved to return bronzed, at any rate. So he bought a

ticket to a small town in Wyoming. There he and his steamer-trunk boarded Thompson's stage, and journeyed to Placer Creek, where the two of them, he and the trunk, took up their quarters in a little board-ceiled room in the Prairie Dog Hotel.

The place was admirably adapted for glooming. It was a ramshackle affair of four streets and sixteen saloons. Some of the houses, and all of the saloons, had once been painted. In front were hitching-rails. To the hitching-rails, at all times of the day, were tied ponies patiently turning their tails to the Wyoming breezes. Wyoming breezes are always going somewhere at the rate of from thirty to sixty miles an hour. Beyond the town, in one direction, were some low mountains, well supplied with dark gorges, narrow cañons, murmuring water-falls, dashing brooks, and precipitous descents. Beyond the town, in the other direction, lay a broad, rolling country, on which cattle and cowboys dwelt amid profanity and dust. Severne arose in a cold room, washed his face in hard water, and descended to breakfast. The breakfast could not have been better adapted to beginning a day of gloom. It started out with sticky oatmeal, and ended with clammy cakes, between which was

much horror. After breakfast, he wandered in the dark gorges, narrow cañons, *et cetera*, and contemplated with melancholy but approving interest his noble sacrifice and the wreck of his life. Thence he returned to town.

In town, various incomprehensible individuals with a misguided sense of humour did things to him, the reason of which he could not understand in the least, mainly because he had himself no sense of humour, misguided or otherwise. The things they did frightened and bewildered him. But he examined them gravely through his short-sighted spectacles, noting just how they were done, just how their perpetrators looked and acted, and just how he felt.

After some days his literary instincts perforce awoke. In spite of his gloom, he caught himself sifting and assorting and placing things in their relative values. In fine, he began to conceive a Western story. Shortly after, he cleaned his fountain pen, by inserting a thin card between the gold and the rubber feeder, and sat down to write. As he wrote he grew more and more pleased with the result. The sentences became crisper and crisper. The adjectives fairly sizzled. Poetic connotation faded as a mountain mist. And he remembered and described just

how Alkali Ike spit through his mustache—which was disgusting, but real. It was his masterpiece. He wrote on excitedly. Never was such a short story!

But then there came a pause. He had successfully mounted his hero, and started him in full flight down the dark gorge or narrow cañon —I forget which—pursued by the avenging band. There interposed here a frightful difficulty. He did not know how a man felt when pursued by an avenging band. He had never been pursued by an avenging band himself. What was he to do? To be sure, he could imagine with tolerable distinctness the sensations to be experienced in such a crisis. He could have put them on paper with every appearance of realism. But he had no touchstone by which to test their truth. He might be unconsciously false to his art, to which he had vowed allegiance at such cost! It would never do.

So, naturally, he did the obvious thing—that is to say, the obvious thing to a serious-minded writer with no sense of humour. He went forth and sought an acquaintance named Colorado Jim, and made to him a proposition. It took Severne just two hours and six drinks to persuade Colorado Jim. At the end of that time

Colorado Jim, in his turn, went forth, shaking his head doubtfully, and emitting from time to time cavernous chuckles which bubbled up from his interior after the well-known manner of the "Old Faithful" geyser. He hunted out six partners of his own—"pards," he called them—to whom he spoke at length. The six pards stared at Colorado Jim in gasping silence for some time. Then the seven went into a committee of the whole. The decision of the committee was that the tenderfoot was undoubtedly crazy, harmless, and to be humoured—at a price. Besides, the humouring would be fun. After a number of drinks, Colorado Jim and the pards concluded that it would be *lots* of fun!

Early the next morning, they rode out of town in the direction of the hills. At the entrance to the dark gorge—or deep cañon—they met Severne, also mounted. After greetings, the latter distributed certain small articles.

"Now," said he, most gravely, "I will ride ahead about as far as that rock there, and when I get ready to start, I will wave my hand. You're to chase me just as you'd chase a real horse-thief, and I'll try to keep ahead of you. You keep shooting with the blank cartridges as fast as you can. Understand?"

They said they did. They did not. But it was fun.

Severne rode to the bowlder in the dark gorge —I am sure it was the dark gorge—and turned. The pards were lined up in eagerness for the start. They had made side bets as to who would get there first. He waved his hand, and struck spurs to his horse. The pursuit began.

The horse on which Severne was mounted was a good one. The way he climbed up through that dark gorge was a caution to thoroughbreds. Behind whooped the joyous seven, and the cracking of pistols was a delight to the ear. The outfit swept up the gulch like a whirlwind.

Severne became quite excited. The swift motion was exhilarating. He mentally noted at least a hundred and ten most realistic minor details. He felt that his money had not been wasted. And then he noticed that he was gradually drawing ahead of his pursuit. Better and better! He would not only experience pursuit, but he would achieve in his own person a genuine escape, for he knew that, whatever the mythical character of the bullets, the Westerners had a real enough intention of racing each other and him to the top of the ridge. He plied his quirt, and looked back. The pursuers were act-

ually dropping behind. Even to his inexperienced eye their animals showed signs of distress.

At this place the narrow gulch divided. Severne turned to the left, as being more nearly level. Down from the right-hand bisection came the boys of the Triangle X outfit.

To the boys of the Triangle X outfit but one course was open. Here were Colorado Jim and the pards on foundered horses, pursuing a rapid individual who was escaping only too easily. Never desert a comrade. The Triangle X boys uttered whoops, and joined the game at speed. Not gaining as rapidly as they wished, they produced long revolvers—and began to shoot. It is a little difficult to hit anything from a running horse. Severne heard the reports, and congratulated himself on the realistic qualities of his little drama. Then suddenly his hat went spinning from his head. At the same instant a bullet ploughed through the leather on his pommel. Zip! zip! went other bullets past his ears. The boys of Triangle X outfit were beginning to get the range.

He looked back. To his horror he discovered that Colorado Jim and the pards had disappeared, and that their places had been taken by a number of maniacs on jumping little ponies.

The maniacs were yelling "Yip! Yip! Yip!" and shooting at him. He could not understand it in the least; but the bullets were mighty convincing. He used his quirt and spurs.

If Severne really wished to experience the feelings of a man pursued, he attained his desire. It is not pleasant to be shot at. Severne entertained sensations of varied coherence, but one and all of a vividness which was of the greatest literary value. Only he was not in a mood to appreciate literary values. He attended strictly to business, which was to lift the excellent animal on which he was mounted as rapidly as possible over the ground. In this he attained a moderate success. Venturing a backward glance, after a few moments, he noted with pleasure that the distance between himself and the maniacs had sensibly increased. Then one of those zipping bullets passed between his body and his arm, cut off three heavy locks of the horse's mane, and entered the base of the poor animal's skull. Severne suddenly found himself in the road. The maniacs swept up at speed, reining in suddenly at the distance of three feet, in such a manner as to scatter much gravel over him. Severne sat up.

The maniacs, with commendable promptness,

jerked Severne to his feet. Several more bent over his horse.

"Jess's I thought!" shouted one of these. "Jess's I thought! He's stole this cayuse. This is Hank Smith's bronc. I'd know him anywhar!"

"That's right! Bar O brand!" cried several.

Then men who held him yanked Severne here and there. "End of yore rope this trip! Steal hosses, will ye!" said they.

"I didn't steal the horse!" cried poor Severne; "I hired him from Smith."

A roar of laughter greeted this statement.

"Hired Colorado and the boys to chase you, too, didn't ye!" suggested one, with heavy sarcasm.

"Yes, I did," answered Severne, sincerely.

They laughed again. "Nerve!" said they.

Near the fallen horse several began discussing the affair. "I tell you I *know* I done it!" argued one. "I ketched him between the sights, jest's fair as could be."

"G'wan, he flummuxed jest's *I* cut loose!"

"Well, boys," called the leader, impatiently, "get along!"

A man came forward, and silently threw a loop about Severne's neck. In Wyoming they hang

horse-thieves. Severne realised this, and told them all about everything. They listened to him, and laughed delightedly. Never had they hanged such a funny horse-thief. They appreciated his efforts to amuse them, and assured him often that he was a peach. When he paused, they encouraged him to say some more. At every new disclosure they chuckled with admiration, as though at a tremendous but splendid lie. Severne was getting more realistic experience in ten minutes than he had had in all his previous life; but realistic experience does not do one much good at the end of a rope on top of a Wyoming mountain. Then, after a little, they deftly threw the coil of rope over the limb of a tree, and hung him up, and left him. They did not shoot him full of holes, as is the usual custom. He had been a funny horse-thief, so in return they were lenient. Severne kicked. "Dancin' good," they observed, as they turned the corner.

Around the corner they met the frantic James. They cut Severne down, and worked over him for some time. Then they carried him down to Placer Creek, and worked over him a lot more. The Triangle X boys were distinctly aggrieved. They had applauded those splendid lies, and now they turned out not to be lies at all, but merely

an extremely crazy sort of truth. They relieved their feelings by getting very drunk and shooting out the lights.

It took Severne a week to get over it. Ten days after that he returned East. He had finished a masterpiece. The flight down the cañon was pictured so vividly that you could almost hear the crack of the pistols, and the hero's sentiments were so well described that in reading about them you became excited yourself. Severne read it three times, and he thought it as good the third time as the first. Then he copied it all out on the typewriter. This is the severest test a writer can give his work. The most sparkling tale loses its freshness when run through the machine, especially if the unfortunate author cannot make the thing go very fast. It seemed as good even after this ordeal.

"Behold," said he, congratulating himself, "this is the best story I ever wrote! Blamed if it isn't one of the best stories I ever *read!* Your romanticists claim that the realistic story has no charm, nor excitement, nor psychical thrill. This'll show them!"

So he hurried to deliver it to Brown. Then he posed industriously to himself, and tried hard to do some more glooming, but it was difficult

work. Someway he felt his cause not hopeless. This masterpiece would go far to convince her that he was right after all.

Three days later he received a note from Brown asking him to call. He did so. The editor handed him back his story, more in sorrow than in anger, and spoke reprovingly about deserting one's principles. Brown was conscientious. He believed that the past counted nothing in face of the present. Severne pressed for an explanation. Then said Brown:

"Severne, I have used much of your stuff, and I have liked it. The sentences have been crisp. The adjectives have been served hot. You have eschewed poetic connotation. And, above all, you have shown men and life as they are. I am sorry to see that you have departed from that noble ideal."

"But," cried Severne, in expostulation, "do not these qualities appear in my story?"

"At first they do," responded Brown, "but later—ah!" He sighed.

"What do you mean?"

"The ride down the cañon," he explained. "The sentences are crisp and the adjectives hot. But, alas! there is much poetic connotation, and, so far from representing real life, it seems to me

only the perperoid lucubrations of a disordered imagination."

"Why, that part is the most realistic in the whole thing!" cried the unhappy author, in distress.

"No," replied the editor, firmly, "it is not. It is not realism at all. Even if there were nothing objectionable about the incident, the man's feelings are frightfully overdrawn. No man ever was such an everlasting coward as you make out your hero! I should be glad to see something else of yours—but that, no!"

Somewhat damped, Severne took his manuscript home with him. There he re-read it. All his old enthusiasm returned. It was exactly true. Realism could have had no more accurate exposition of its principles. He cursed Brown, and inclosed stamps to the *Decade*. After a time he received a check and a flattering letter. Realism stood vindicated!

In due course the story appeared. During the interim Severne had found that his glooming was becoming altogether too realistic for his peace of mind. As time went on and he saw nothing of Lucy Melville, he began to realise that perhaps, after all, he was making a mistake somewhere. At certain recklessly immoral moments he even

thought a very little of proving false to art. To such depths can the human soul descend!

The evening after the appearance of his story in the *Decade,* he was sitting in front of his open fire in very much that mood. The lamps had not been lighted. To him came Mortimer, his man. "A leddy to see you, sir; no name," he announced, solemnly.

Severne arose in some surprise. "Light the lamp, and show her up," he commanded, wondering who she could be.

At the sound of his voice, the visitor pushed into the room past Mortimer.

"Never mind the lamp," cried Lucy Melville. The faithful Mortimer left the room, and—officially—heard no more.

"Why, Lucy!" cried Severne.

In the dim light he could see that her cheeks were glowing with excitement. She crossed the room swiftly, and put her hands on his shoulders. "Bob," she said, gravely, with tears in her eyes, "I know I ought not to be here, but I just couldn't help it! After you were so noble! And it won't matter, for I'm going in just a minute."

Severne cast his mind back in review of his noble acts. "What is it, Lucy?" he inquired.

"As if you could ask!" she cried. "I never

knew of a man's doing so tactful and graceful and *beautiful* a thing in my life! And I don't care a bit, and I believe you were right, after all."

"Right about what?" he begged, getting more and more bewildered.

"About the realism, of course."

She looked up at him again, pointing out her chin in the most adorable fashion. Even serious-minded men have moments of lucidity. Severne had one now.

"Oh, no, you mustn't, Bob—dear!" she cried, blushing.

"But really, Bob," she went on, after a moment, "even if realism is all right, you must admit that your last story is the best thing you ever wrote."

"Why, yes, I do think so," he agreed, wondering what that had to do with it.

"I'm so glad you do. Do you know, Bob," she continued, happily, "I read it all through before I noticed whose it was. And I kept saying to myself, 'I *do* wish Bob could see this story. I'm sure it would convince him that imagination is better than realism'; for really, Bob," she cried, with enthusiasm, "it is the best imaginative story I ever read. And when I got to the end, and saw the signature, and realised that you had de-

serted your literary principles just for my sake, and had actually gone to work and written such a *splendid* imaginative story after all you had said; and then, too, when I realised what a delicate way you had taken to let me know—because, of course, I never read that magazine of Brown's —oh, Bob!" she concluded, quite out of breath.

Severne hesitated for almost a minute. He saw his duty plainly; he was serious-minded; he had no sense of humour. Then she looked up at him as before, pointing her chin out in the most adorable fashion.

"Oh, Bob! Again! I really don't think you ought to!"

And Art; oh, where was it?

VI

THE PROSPECTOR

In the old mining days out West the law of the survival of the fittest held good, and he who survived had to be very fit indeed. There were a number of ways of not surviving. One of them was to die. And there were a number of ways of being very fit; such as holding an accurate gun or an even temper, being blessed with industry or a vital-tearing ambition, knowing the game thoroughly or understanding the great American expedient of bluff. In any case the man who survived must see his end clearly through that end's means. Whether it were gold, poker, or life, he must cling to his purpose with a bulldog tenacity that no amount of distraction could loosen. Otherwise, as has been said, he died, or begged, or robbed, or became a tramp, or committed the suicide of horse-stealing, or just plain drifted back East broken—a shameful thing.

Why Peter lived on was patent enough to

anyone. He was harmless, good-natured, and, in the estimation of hard-hewn men, just "queer" enough to be a little pathetic. Anyone who had once caught a fair look at his narrow, hatchet face with the surprised blue eyes and the loose-falling, sparse light hair; or had enjoyed his sweet, rare smile as he deprecatingly answered a remark before effacing himself; or had chanced on the fortune of asking him for some trifling favour to meet his eager and pleased rendering of it: none of these hypothetical individuals, and that meant about everyone who came in contact with Peter at all, could have imagined anybody, let alone themselves, harming a hair of his head. But how he continued to be a prospector remained a puzzle. The life is hard, full of privations, sown with difficulties, clamant for technical knowledge, exacting of physical strength, dependent on shrewdness and knowledge of the world. Peter had none of these, not even in the smallest degree. There was also, of course, the instinct. This Peter did possess. He could follow his leads of crumbling brown rock with that marvellous intuitive knowledge which is so important an element in the equipment of your true prospector. But it is only an element. By all the rules of the game Peter should have

failed long since, should have "cashed in and quit" some five years back; and still he grubbed away cheerfully at divers mountains and many ranges. He had not succeeded; still, he had not failed.

Three times had he made his "strike." On the first of these three occasions he had gone in with two San Francisco men to develop the property. The San Francisco men had persuaded him to form a stock company of certain capitalisation. In two deals they had "frozen out" Peter completely, and reorganised on a basis which is paying them good dividends. Returning overwhelmed with sophistries and "explanations" from his expostulatory interview, Peter decided he knew more about quartz leads than about business and the disgorging of gains, so he went over into Idaho to try again. There he found the famous Antelope Gap lode. This time he determined to sell outright and have nothing more to do with the matter after the transfer of the property. He drew up the deeds, received a small amount down, and took notes for the balance. When the notes came due he could not collect them. The mine had been resold to third parties. Peter had no money to contest the affair; and probably would not have done so if he

had. He knew too little—or too much—of law; but the instinct was his, so he moved one State farther east to Montana for his third trial. This resulted in the Eagle Ridge. And for the third time he was swindled by a persuasive man and a lying one-sided contract.

A sordid, silly enough little tale, is it not? but that is why men wondered at Peter's survival, marvelled at the recuperative force that made possible his fourth attempt, speculated with a certain awe over that cheerful disposition which had earned him, even in his adversity, the sobriquet of Happy Peter.

All of these phenomena, had they but known it, resulted from one simple cause. Peter's mental retrospect for a considerable space would have conjured up nothing but a succession of grand sweeps of mountains, singing pines, rare western skies, and the simplicity of a frontiersman's log-cabin; and yet to his inner vision over the border of that space lay a very different scene. It was the scene he saw the oftenest. Oftenest? he saw it always; across the mountains, through the pines, beyond the skies. As time went on, the vision simplified itself to Peter, as visions will. It came to have two phases, two elements, which visited him always together.

One of these was a house; the other a girl. The house was low, white-painted, with green blinds and a broad stoop. Its front yard was fragrant with lilacs, noisy with crickets, fluttering with butterflies of sulphur yellow. About it lay a stony, barren farm, but lovely with the glamour of home. The girl was not pretty, as we know girls; but she had straight steady eyes, a wide brow, smooth matronly bands of hair, and a wholesome, homely New England character, sweet, yet with a tang to give it a flavour, like the apples on the tree near the old-fashioned, long-armed well. Peter could gain no competence from the stony farm, no consent from the girl. It was to win both that he had come West.

In those days, around the western curve of the earth, every outlook borrowed the tints of sunset. Nothing but the length of the journey stood between a man and his fortune.

"I love you dearly, Peter," she had said, both hands on his shoulders, "and I do not care for the money. But I have seen too much of it here —too much of the unhappiness that comes from debt, from poverty. Misery does not love the company of those it loves. Go make your fortune, Peter, bravely, and come back to me."

"I will," replied Peter, soberly. "I will, God help me. But it may be long. I don't know; I have not the knack; I am stupid about people, about men."

She smiled, and leaned over to kiss his eyes. "People love you, Peter," she said, simply. "*I* love you, and I will wait. If it were fifty years, you will find me here ready when you come."

Peter knew this to be true. And so to the unpeopled rooms of the little old Vermont farmhouse Peter's gentle thoughts ever swarmed, like homing bees. In his vision of it the lilac-bush outside the window always smelled of spring; she always sat there beside the open sash, waiting—for him. What wonder that he survived when so many others went down? What wonder that he persevered? What wonder that his patient soul, comparing the eternity of love's happiness with the paltry years of love's waiting, saw nothing in the condition of affairs to ruffle its peaceful serenity? And yet to most the time would have seemed very, very long. Men may blunder against rich pockets or leads and wealthy say farewell to a day which they greeted as the poorest of the poor. So may men win fortunes on a turn of the wheat market. But the one is no more prospecting than the other is business.

True prospecting has only the normal percentage of uncertainties, the usual alloy of luck to brighten its toil with the hope of the unexpected. A man must know his business to succeed. A bit of rock, a twist of ledge, a dip of country, an abundance or an absence of dikes—these and many others are the symbols with which the prospector builds the formula that spells gold. And after the formula is made, it must be proved. It is the proving that bends the back, tries the patience, strains to the utmost the man's inborn Instinct of the Metal. For that is the work of the steel and the fire, the water and the power of explosion. Until the proof is done to the Q.E.D., the man must draw for inspiration on his stock of faith. In the morning he sharpens his drills at a forge. In the afternoon he may, by the grace of labour, his Master, have accomplished a little round hole in the rock, which, being filled with powder and fired, will tear loose into a larger hole with débris. The débris must be removed by pick and shovel. After the hole has been sufficiently deepened, the débris must be loaded into a bucket, which must then be hauled to the surface of the ground and emptied. How long do you calculate the man will require to dig in this manner, fifty, a hundred feet? How

long to sink one or two such shafts on each and every claim he has staked? How long to excavate the numerous lateral tunnels which the Proof demands?

And besides this, from time to time the shaft must be elaborately timbered in order to prevent its caving in and burying work and workman together—a tedious job, requiring the skill alike of a woodsman, a carpenter, a sailor, and a joiner. The man must make his trips to town for supplies. He must cook his meals. He must meet his fellows occasionally, or lose the power of speech. The years slip by rapidly. He numbers his days by what he has accomplished; and it is little. He measures time by his trips to camp; and they are few. It is no small thing to make three discoveries—and lose them. It is a greater thing to find courage for a fourth attempt.

After the Eagle Ridge fiasco, Peter, as cheerful as ever, journeyed over into Wyoming to try his luck once more. He moved up into the hills, spent a month in looking about him, narrowed his localities to one gulch, and built himself a log cabin in which to live. Then he made his general survey. He went on foot up every gulch, even every little transverse wrinkle that lay tributary to his valley, to the shallow top of it filled with

loose stones; he followed the sky-line of every ridge which bordered and limited these gulches; he seized frequent opportunities of making long diagonals down the slopes. Nothing escaped him. In time he knew the general appearance of every bit of drift or outcrop in his district. Then he sat down in his cabin and carefully considered the probabilities. If they had not happened to please him, he would have repeated the whole wearisome process in another valley; but as in this case they did, he proceeded to take the next step. In other words, he went over the same ground again with a sampling-pick and a bundle of canvas bags. Where his theories or experience advised, he broke off quantities of rock from the ledges, which he crushed and mixed in the half of an old blanket; dividing, and recrushing again and again, until an "average" was obtained in small compass. The "average" he took home, where he dumped it into a heavy iron mortar, over which he had suspended a pestle from a springy sapling. By alternately pulling down and letting up on the sapling he crushed the quartz fragments with the pestle into fine red and white sand. The sand he "panned out" for indications of free gold.

The ledges whose averages thus showed the

colour, he marked on his map with a cross. Some leads which did not so exhibit gold, but whose other indications he considered promising, he exploited still further, penetrating to a layer below the surface by means of a charge or so of powder. Or perhaps he even spent several weeks in making an irregular hole like a well, from which he carried the broken rock in bags, climbing up a notched tree. Then he selected more samples. This is hard work.

Thus Peter came to know his country, and when he knew it thoroughly, when he had made all his numerous speculations as to horses, blow-outs, and slips—then, and not until then, did he stake out his claims; then, and not until then, did he consider himself ready to *begin* work.

He might be quite wrong in his calculations. In that case, it was all to do over again somewhere else. He had had this happen. Every prospector has. The claims which Peter selected were four in number. He started in without delay on the proof. Foot by foot the shafts descended through the red, the white, vein matter. One by one the spider arms of the tunnels felt out into the innermost crevices of the lode. Little by little Peter's table of statistics filled; here a pocket, there a streak, yon a clear ten feet of

low-grade ore. The days, the months, even the years slipped by. Summers came and went with a flurry of thunder-showers that gathered about Harney, spread abroad in long bands of blackness, broke in a deluge of rain and hail and passed out to dissipate in the hot air of the prairies. Autumns, clear-eyed and sweet-breathed, faded wanly in the smoke of their forest fires. Winters sidled by with constant threat of arctic weather which somehow never came; powdering the hills with their snow; making bitter cold the shadows, and warm the silver-like sun. Another spring was at hand. Like all the rest, it coquetted with the season as a young girl with her lover; smiling with the brightness of a western sun; frowning with the fierceness of a sudden snow-squall, strangely out of place in contrast to the greenery of the mountain "parks"; creeping slowly up the gullies from the prairie in staccato notes of bursting buds; at last lifting its many voices in the old swelling song of delight over the birth of new loves and new desires among its creatures.

Like all the rest, did I say? No, not quite. To Peter this particular spring was a rare thing of beauty. Its gilding was a little brighter, its colours a little fresher, its skies a little deeper,

its songs rang a little truer than ever the gilding or colours or skies or songs of any spring he had ever known. For he was satisfied. Steadily the value of the property had proved itself. One clear, cold day he collected all his drills and picks and sledges and brought them back to camp, where he stacked them behind the door. It was his way of signing Q.E.D. to the proof.

The doubtful spot on the *Jim Crow* was not a blow-out, but a "horse." He had penetrated below it. The mines were rich beyond his dreams. Yet he sat there at his noon meal as cheerful, as unexcited, as content as ever. When one has waited so long, impatience sleeps soundly, arouses with the sluggishness of unbelief itself. Outside he saw the sun, for the first time in weeks, and heard the pines singing their endless song. Inside, his fire sparkled and crackled; his kettle purred like a fireside cat. Peter was tired; tired, but content. The dream was very near to him.

When he had finished his meal he got up and examined himself in his little square mirror. Then he did so again. Then he walked heavily back to his table and sat down and buried his face in his hands. When he had looked the first time he had seen a gray hair. When he had looked

the second time he had discovered that there were many. With a sudden pang Peter realised that he was getting to be an old man. He took a picture from a pocket-case and looked at that. Was she getting to be an old woman?

It was fearful what a difference that little thought suddenly made. A moment ago he had had the eternities before him. Now there was not an instant to be wasted. Every minute, every second even, that he sat there gazing at the faded old picture in his hand was so much lost to him and to its original. Not God himself could bring it and its possibilities back to him. Until now he had looked about him upon Youth; he must henceforth look back to it—back to the things which might have been, but could never be—and each pulse-beat carried him inevitably farther from even the retrospective simulacrum of their joys. He and she could never begin young now. They must take up life cold in the moulds, ready fashioned. The delight of influencing each other's development was denied such as they; instead, they must find each other out, must throw a thousand strands of loving-kindness to span the gap which the patient years had sundered between them, a gap which should never have widened at all. Again that remorse-

less hurry of the moments! Each one of them made the cast across longer, increased the need for loving-kindness, demanded anew, for the mere pitiful commonplace task of understanding each other—which any mother and her child find so trivially easy—the power of affection which each would have liked to shower on the other undictated except by the desires of their hearts. Peter called up the image of himself as he had been when he had left the East, and set it remorselessly by the side of that present image in the mirror. Then he looked at the portrait. Could the years have changed her as much? If so, he would hardly know her!

Those miserable years of waiting! He had not minded them before, but now they were horrible. In the retrospect the ceaseless drudgery of rock and pick and drill loomed larger than the truth of it; his patience, at the time so spontaneous a result of his disposition, seemed that of a man clinging desperately to a rope, able to hang on only by the concentration of every ounce of his will. Peter felt himself clutching the rope so hard that he could think of nothing, absolutely nothing, else. He proved a great necessity of letting go.

And for her, these years? What had they

meant? By the internal combustion which had so suddenly lighted up the dark corners of his being, he saw with almost clairvoyant distinctness how it must have been. He saw her growing older, as he had grown older, but in the dull apathy of monotony. She had none of this great filling Labour wherewith to drug herself into day-dreams of a future. The seasons as they passed showed her the same faces, growing ever a little more jaded, as dancers in the light of dawn. Perhaps she had ceased counting them? No, he knew better than that. But the pity of it! washing, scrubbing, mending; mending, scrubbing, washing to the time of an invalid's complaints. To-day she was doing as she had done yesterday; to-morrow she would do the same. To-morrow?

"No, by God!" cried Peter, starting to his feet. "There shall be no more to-morrow!"

He took from the shelf over the window a number of pieces of quartz, which he stuffed into the pockets of a pair of saddle-bags lying near the door. In the corral was Jenny, a sleek, fat mare. He saddled Jenny and departed with the saddle-bags, leaving the door of his cabin open to the first comer, as is the hospitable Western way.

At Beaver Dam he spread the chunks of rock

out on the bar of the principal saloon and invited inspection. He did not think to find a purchaser among the inhabitants of Beaver Dam, but he knew that the tidings of his discoveries would arouse interest and attract other prospectors to the locality of his claims. In this manner his property would come prominently on the market.

The discoveries certainly were accorded attention enough. Peter was well known. Men were perfectly sure of his veracity and his mining instinct. If Peter said there existed a good lode of the stuff he exhibited to them, that settled it.

"Hum," said a man named Squint-eye Dobs, after examining a bit of the transparent crystal through which small kernels of yellow metal shone. Then he laid down the specimen, and walked quietly out the door without further comment. He had gone to get his outfit ready.

To others, not so prompt of action, Peter explained at length, always in that hesitating, diffident voice of his.

"I have my claims all staked," said he; "you boys can come up and hook onto what's left. There's plenty left. I ain't saying it's as good as mine; still, it's pretty good. I think it'll make a camp."

"Make a camp!" shouted Cheyenne Harry. "I should think it would! If there's any more like that up country you can sell a 'tater-patch if it lays anywheres near the district!"

"Well, I must be goin', boys," said Peter, sidling toward the door; "and I 'spect I'll see some of you boys up there?"

The boys did not care to commit themselves as to that before each other, but they were all mentally locating the ingredients of their prospecting outfits.

"Have a drink, Happy, on me," hospitably suggested the proprietor.

Peter slowly returned to the bar.

"Here's luck to the new claim, Happy," said the proprietor; "and here's hoping the sharps doesn't make all there is on her."

The men laughed, but not ill-naturedly. They all knew Peter, as has been said.

Peter turned again to the door.

"You'll have a reg'lar cyclone up thar by to-morrow!" called a joker after him; "look out fer us! There'll be an unholy mob on hand, and they'll try to do you, sure!"

Peter stopped short, looked at the speaker, and went out hurriedly.

The next morning the men came into his

gulch. He heard them even before he had left his bunk — the *clink,* creak, creak! of their wagons. By the time he had finished breakfast the side-hills were covered with them. From his window he could catch glimpses of them through the straight pines as patches of red, or flashes of light reflected from polished metal. In the cañon was the gleam of fires; in the air the smell of wood-smoke and of bacon broiling; among the still bare bushes and saplings the shine of white lean-tops; horses fed eagerly on the young grasses and the browse of trees, raising their heads as the creak of wheels farther down the draw told of yet new-comers. The boom was under way.

Peter knew that the tidings of the discovery would spread. To-morrow a new town would deserve a place on the map. Men would come to the town, men with money, men anxious to invest. With them Peter would treat. There was to be no chance of a careless bargain this time. He would take no chances. And yet he had thought that before.

Peter began to forestall difficulties in his mind. The former experience suggested many, but he drew from the same source their remedies. It was the great unknown that terrified him. In

spite of his years, in spite of his gray hairs, in spite of his memories of those former failures, he had to confess to himself that he knew nothing, absolutely nothing of sharpers and their methods. They could not fleece him again in precisely the way they had done so before; but how could he guess at the tricks they had in reserve? Eight years out of a man's life ought surely to teach him caution as thoroughly as twelve. Yet he walked into the Eagle Ridge trap as confidently as he had into the Antelope Gap. He had made it twelve years. What was to prevent his making it sixteen? There is no fear like that of the absolutely unknown. You cannot forestall that; you must depend upon your own self-confidence. Self-confidence was just what Peter did not possess.

Then in a flash he saw what he should have done. It was all so ridiculously simple—a mere question of division of labour. He, Peter, knew prospecting, but did not understand business. Back in his old Vermont home were a dozen honest men who knew business, but understood nothing of prospecting. Nothing would have been easier than to have combined these qualities and lacks. If Peter had returned quietly to his people, concealing his discoveries from the men of

Beaver Dam, he could have returned in three weeks' time equipped for his negotiations. Now it was too late. The minute his back was turned they would jump his claims. Peter's mind worked slowly. If he had felt himself less driven by the sight of those gray hairs, he might have come in time to another idea—that of wiring or writing East for a partner, pending whose arrival he could merely hold possession of the claims. As it was, the terror and misgiving, having obtained entry, rapidly usurped the dominion of his thoughts. He could see nothing before him but the inevitable and dread bargaining with unknown powers of dishonesty, nothing behind him but the mistake of starting the "boom."

As the morning wore away he went out into the hills to look about him. The men were all busily enough engaged in chipping out the shallow troughs of their "discoveries," piling supporting rocks about their corner and side stakes, or tacking up laboriously composed mining "notices." They paid scant attention to the man who passed them a hundred yards away. Peter visited his own four claims. On one he found a small group anxiously examining the indications of the lead. He did not join it. The parting words flung after him at the saloon came to

his mind. "Look out for us! There'll be an unholy mob on hand, and they'll try to do you, sure."

Peter cooked himself a noon meal, but he did not eat much of it. Instead, he sat quite still and stared with wide, blind eyes at the wavering mists of steam that arose from the various hot dishes. From time to time he got up with apparent purpose, which, however, left him before he had taken two steps, so that his movement speedily became aimless, and he sat down again. Late in the afternoon he went the rounds of his claims again, but saw nothing unusual. He did not take the trouble to cook supper. During the evening some men looked in for a moment or so, but went away, because the cabin was empty. Peter was at the moment of their visit walking back and forth, back and forth, away up high there on the top of the ridge, in a little cleared flat space next the stars. When he came to the end, he whirled sharp on his heels. It was six paces one way and five the other. He counted the steps consciously, until the mental process became mechanical. Then the count went on steadily behind his other thoughts—five, six; five, six; five, six; over and over again, like that. About ten o'clock he ceased opening and shutting his

hands and began to scream, at first under his breath, then louder in the over tone, then with the full strength of his lungs. A mountain lion on another slope answered him. He stretched his arms up over his head, every muscle tense, and screamed. And then, without appreciable transition, he sank to the rock and hid his face. For the moment the nerve tension had relaxed.

The clear western stars, like fine silver powder, seemed to glimmer in some light stronger than their own, as dust-motes in the sun. A breeze from the prairie rested its light, invisible hands on the man's bent head. Certain homely night-sounds, such as the tree-toads and crickets and the cries of the poor wills, stole here and there through the pine-aisles like living creatures on the wing. A faint, sweet odour of the woods came with them. Peter arose, and drew a deep breath, and went to his cabin. The peace of nature had for the moment become his own.

But then, in the darkness of his low bunk, the old doubts, the old terrors returned. They perched there above him and compelled him to look at them until his eyes were hot and red. "*Do, do, do!*" said they, until Peter arose, and there, in the chill of dawn, he walked the three

miles necessary for the inspection of his claims. Everything was as it should be. The men in the gulch were not yet awake. From the *Jim Crow* a drowsy porcupine trundled away bristling.

This could not go on. It would be weeks before he could hope even to open his negotiations. Peter cooked himself an elaborate breakfast—and drank half a cup of coffee. Then he sat, as he had the day before, staring straight in front of him, seeing nothing. After a time he placed the girl's picture and the square mirror side by side on the table and looked at them intently.

He rose, kicking his chair over backward, and went out to his claims once more.

The men in the gulch had awakened. Most of them had finished the more imperative demands of location the day before, so now they were more at leisure to satisfy their curiosity and their love of comment by inspecting the original discovery to which all this stampede was due. As a consequence Peter found a great gathering on the *Jim Crow*. Some of the men were examining chunks of ore, others were preparing to descend the shafts, still others were engaged idly in reading the location-notice tacked against a stub pine. One of the latter, the same individual

who had joked Peter in the saloon, caught sight of the prospector as he approached.

"Hullo, Happy!" he called, pointing at the weather-beaten notice. "What do you call this?" He winked at the rest. The history of Peter's losses was well known.

"What?" asked Peter, strangely.

"You ain't got this readin' right. She says 'fifteen hundred feet'; the law says she ought t' read 'fifteen hundred *linear* feet.' Your claim is n.g. I'm goin' t' jump her on you."

The statement was ridiculous; everybody knew it, and prepared to laugh, loud-mouthed.

Peter, without a word, shot the speaker through the heart. Men said at his trial that it was the most brutal and unprovoked murder they had ever known.

VII

THE GIRL IN RED

"It isn't *that* I object to," protested the Easterner, leaning forward from the rough log wall to give emphasis to his words, "for I believe in everyone having his fun his own way. If you're going in for orgies, why, have 'em *good* orgies, and be done with it. But my kick's on letting these innocent young girls who are just out for the fun—it's awful!"

"It's hell!" assented the Westerner, cheerfully.

"Now, look at that pretty creature over there——"

The young miner followed his companion's gaze through the garishly lit crowd. Then, as though in doubt as to whether he had seen correctly, he tried it again.

"Which do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"The one in red. Now, she——"

The Westerner snorted irrepressibly.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired the Easterner, looking on him with suspicious eyes.

The other choked his laugh in the middle, and instantly assumed an expression of intense solemnity. It was as though a candle had blown out in the wind.

"Beg pardon. Nothing," he asserted with brevity of enunciation. "Go on."

The girl in red was standing tiptoe on a bench under one of the big lanterns. She was holding her little palm slantwise over the chimney, and by blowing against it was trying to put out the lamp. Her face was very serious and flushed. Occasionally the lamp would flare up a little, and she would snatch her hand away with a pretty gesture of dismay as the uprising flame would threaten to scorch it. A group of interested men surrounded and applauded her. Two on the outside stood off the proprietor of the dance-hall. The proprietor was objecting.

"Well, then, just look at that girl, I say," the Easterner went on. "She's as pretty and fresh and innocent as a mountain flower. She's having the time of her young life, and she just thinks it means a good time and nothing else. Some day she'll find out it means a lot else. I tell you, it's awful!"

The Westerner surveyed his friend's flushed face with silent amusement. The girl finally succeeded in blowing the light out, and everybody yelled.

"Same old fellow you were in college, aren't you, Bert?" he said, affectionately; "succouring the distressed and borrowing other people's troubles. What can you do?"

"Do, do! What can any man do? Take her out of this! appeal to her better nature!"

Bert started impulsively forward to where the girl—with assistance—was preparing to jump from the bench. The miner caught his sleeve in alarm.

"Hold on, don't make a row! Wait a minute!" he begged; "she isn't worth it! There, now listen," as the other sank back expectantly to his former position. His bantering manner returned. "You and the windmills," he breathed, in relief. "I'll just shatter your ideals a few to pay for that scare. You shall now hear a fact or so concerning that pretty, innocent girl—I forget your other adjective. In the first place, she isn't in the mountain-flower business a little bit. Her name is Anne Bingham, but she is more popularly known as Bismarck Anne, chiefly because of all the camps of our beloved

territory Bismarck is the only one she hasn't visited. Therefore, it is concluded she must have come from there."

"Bismarck Anne!" repeated the Easterner, wonderingly. "She isn't the one——"

"The very same. She's about as bad as they make 'em, and I don't believe she misses a payday dance a year. She's all right, now; but you want to come back a little later. Anne will be drunk—gloriously drunk—and very joyful. I will say that for her. She has all the fun there is in it while it lasts."

"Whew!" whistled the Easterner, in dazed repulsion, looking with interest on the girl's animated face.

"Oh, what do you care!" responded the miner, carelessly. "She has her fun."

Bismarck Anne jumped into the nearest man's arms, was kissed, bestowed a slap, and flitted away down the room. She deftly stole the accordion from beneath the tall look-out stool on which a musician sat and ran, evolving strange noises from the instrument, and scampering in and out among the benches, pursued by its owner. The men all laughed heartily, and tried to trip up the pursuer. The women laughed hollow laughs, to show they were not jealous of the

sensation she was creating. Finally she ran into the proprietor, just turning from relighting the big lamp. The proprietor, being angry, rescued the accordion roughly; whereupon Anne pouted and cast appealing glances on her friends. The friends responded to a man. The proprietor set up the drinks.

The music started up again. Miners darted here and there toward the gaudily dressed women, and, seizing them about the waist, held them close to their sides, as a claim of proprietorship before the whole world. Perspiring masters of ceremonies, self-constituted and drunk, rushed back and forth, trying to put a semblance of the quadrilateral into the various sets. Everybody shuffled feet impatiently.

The dance began with a swirl of noise and hilarious confusion. Bismarck Anne added to the hilarity. She was having a high old time; why shouldn't she? She had had three glasses of forty-rod, and was blessed by nature with a lively disposition and an insignificant bump of reverence. Moreover, she was healthy of body, red of blood, and reckless of consequences. Pleasure appealed to her; the stir of action, the delight of the flow of high spirits, thrilled through every fibre of her being. She had no be-

liefs, as far as she knew. If she could have told of them, they would have proved simple in the extreme—that life comes to those who live out their possibilities, and not to those who deny them. And Anne had many possibilities, and was living them fast. She felt almost physically the beat of pleasure in the atmosphere about her, and from it she reacted to a still higher pitch. She had drunk three glasses, and her head was not strong. Her feet moved easily, and she was very certain of her movements. She had become just hazy enough in her mental processes to have attained that happy indifference to what is likely to happen in the immediate future, and that equally happy disregard of consequences which the virtuous never experience. Impressions reduced themselves to their lowest terms—movement and noise. The room was full of rapidly revolving figures. The racket was incessant, and women's laughter rose shrill above it, like wind above a storm. Anne moved amid it all as the controller of its destinies, and wherever she went seemed to her to be the one stable point in the kaleidoscopic changes. Men danced with her, but they were meaningless men. One begged her to dance with him, but Anne stopped to watch a youth blowing brutishly from puffed

cheeks, so the man cursed and left her for another girl. Beyond the puffing youth lights were dancing, green and red. Anne paused and looked at them gravely.

The people, the room, the sounds seemed to her to come and go in great bursts. Between these bursts Anne knew nothing except that she was happy; above all else she was happy. As incidents men kissed her and she drank; but these things were not essentially different from the lights and the bursts of consciousness. Anne began to take everything for granted.

After a time Anne paused again to look gravely at strange lights. But this time they seemed not to be red or green, but to be of orange, in long, fiery flashes, like ribbons thrown suddenly out and as suddenly withdrawn. The noise stopped, and was succeeded by a buzzing. For a moment the girl's blurred vision saw clearly the room, all still, except for a man huddled in one corner, and on the floor a slowly gathering pool of red. Someone thrust her out of the door with others, and she began to step aimlessly, uncertainly, along the broad street.

She felt dimly the difference between the hot air of the dance-hall and the warm air out of doors. The great hills and the stars and the

silhouetted houses came and went in visions, just as had the people and the noise inside the hall. The idea of walking came to her, and occupied her mind to the exclusion of everything else, and she set about it with great intentness. How far she went and in what direction did not seem to matter. When she moved she was happy; when she stopped she was miserable. So she wandered on in the way she knew, and yet did not know, out of the broad streets of the town, through a wide cleft in the hills, up a long grassy valley that wound slowly and mounted gradually, following the brawl of the stream, until at last she found herself in a little fern-grown dell at the entrance of Iron Creek Pass. She pushed her fingers through her fallen hair, and idly over the shimmering stuff of her gown. Far above her she saw waveringly the stars. Finally the idea of sleep came to her, just as the idea of walking had come to her before. She sank to her knees, hesitated a moment, and then, with the sigh of a tired child, she pillowed her head on her soft round arm and closed her eyes.

. . . . . .

The poor-wills ceased their plaintive cries. A few smaller birds chirped drowsily. Back of

the eastern hills the stars became a little dimmer, and the soft night breeze, which had been steadily blowing through the darkened hours, sank quietly to sleep. The subtle magic of nature began to sketch in the picture of day, throwing objects forward from the dull background, taking them bodily out of the blackness, as though creating them anew. Fresh life stirred through everything. The vault of heaven seemed full of it, and all the ravines and by-ways caught up its overflow in a grand chorus of praise to the new-whitening morning.

The woman stirred drowsily and arose, throwing back her heavy hair from her face. The flush of sleep still dyed her cheek a rich crimson, which came and went slowly in the light of the young sun, vying in depth now with the silk of her gown, now with the still deeper tones of a mountain red-bird which splattered into rainbow tints the waters of the brook. She caught the sound of the stream, and went to it. The red-bird retreated circumspectly, silently. She knelt at the banks and splashed the icy water over her face and throat, another red-bird, another wild thing pulsing and palpitating with life. Then she arose to the full height of her splendid body and looked abroad.

The morning swept through her like a river and left her clean. In the eye of nature and before the presence of nature's innumerable creatures she stood as innocent as they. She had entered into noisome places, but so had the marsh-hawk poising grandly on motionless wing there above. She had scrambled in the mire, and she was ruffled and draggled and besmirched; so likewise had been the silent flame-bird in the thicket, but he had washed clean his plumes and was now singing the universal hymn from the nearest bush-top. The woman drew her lungs full of the morning. She stretched slowly, lazily, her muscles one by one, and stood taller and freer for the act. The debauch of the last night, the debauches of other and worse nights, the acid-like corrosion of that vulgarity which is more subtle than sin even, all these things faded into a past that was dead and gone and buried forever. The present alone was important, and the present brought her, innocent, before an innocent nature. As she stood there dewy-eyed, wistful, glowing, with loosened hair, the grasses clinging to her, and the dew, she looked like a wide-eyed child-angel newly come to earth. To her the morning was great and broad, like a dream to be dreamed and awakened from, something unreal and eva-

nescent which would go. Her heart unfolded to its influence, and she felt within her that tenderness for the beautiful which is nearest akin to holy tears.

As she stood thus, musing, it seemed natural that a human figure should enter and become part of the dream. It seemed natural that it should be a man, and young; that he should be handsome and bold. It seemed natural that he should rein in his horse at the sight of her. So inevitable was it all, so much in keeping with the soft sky, the brooding shadow of the mountain, the squirrel noises, and the day, that she stood there motionless, making no sign, looking up at him with parted lips, saying nothing. He was only a fraction, a small fraction, of all the rest. His fine brown eyes, the curl of his long hair, the bronze of his features mattered no more to her than the play of the sunlight on Harney.

Then he spurred his horse forward, and something in her seemed to snap. From the dream-present the woman was thrust roughly back into her past. The sunlight faded away before her eyes, oozing from the air in drop after drop of golden splendour, the songs of the birds died, the murmuring of the brook became an angry brawl that accused the world of wickedness. The

morning fled. From a distance, far away, farther than Harney, farther than the sky, the stranger's brown eyes looked pityingly. Her sin was no longer animal. It had touched her soul. Instead of an incident it had become a condition which hemmed her in, from which she could not escape. Suddenly she saw the difference. She dwelt in darkness; he, with his clear soul, dwelt in light. She threw herself face downward on the earth, weeping and clutching the grass in the agony of her sin.

Then a new sound smote the air. She sat upright and listened.

Around the bend she heard a high-pitched voice declaiming in measured tones.

" 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations,' " the voice chanted.

" 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth all that he bowed down.' "

The speaker strode in sight. He was one of the old-fashioned itinerant preachers occasionally seen in the Hills, filled with fanatic enthusiasm, journeying from place to place on foot, exhorting by the fear of hell fire rather than by the hope of heaven's bliss, half-crazy, half-inspired, wholly in earnest. His form was gaunt. He

was clad in a shiny black coat buttoned closely, and his shoes showed dusty and huge beneath his carefully turned-up trousers. A beaver of ancient pattern was pushed far back from his narrow forehead, and from beneath it flashed vividly his fierce hawk-eyes. Over his shoulder, suspended from a cane, was a carpet-bag. He stepped eagerly forward with an immense excess of nervous force that carried him rapidly on. Nothing more out of place could be imagined than this comical figure against the simplicity of the hills. Yet for that very reason he was the more grateful to the woman's perturbed soul. She listened eagerly for his next words.

He strode fiercely across the stones of the little ford, declaiming with energy, with triumph:

" 'The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.

" 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.

" 'The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.

" 'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.

" 'He will fulfil the desire of all that fear Him: He also will hear their cry and save them.' "

Anne saw but two things plainly in all the world—the clear-eyed stranger like a god; this fiery old man who spoke words containing strange, though vague, intimations of comfort. From the agony of her soul but one thought leaped forth—to make the comfort real, to find out how to raise herself from her sin, to become worthy of the goodness which she had that morning for the first time clearly seen. She sprang forward and seized the preacher's arm. Interrupted in his ecstasy, he rolled his eyes down on her but half comprehending.

"How? How?" she gasped. "Help me! What must I do?"

She held out her empty hands with a gesture of appeal. The old man's mind still burned with the fever of his fanatical inspiration. He hardly saw her, and did not understand all the import of her words. He looked at her vacantly, and caught sight of her outstretched hands.

" 'And to work with your hands as we command you,' " he quoted vaguely, then shook himself free of her detaining grasp and marched grandly on, rolling out the mighty syllables of the psalms.

"To work with my hands; to work with my

hands," the woman repeated looking at her outspread palms. "Yes, that is it!" she said, slowly.

. . . . . .

Anne Bingham washed dishes at the Prairie Dog Hotel for a week. The first day was one of visions; the second one of irksomeness; the third one of wearisome monotony. The first was as long as it takes to pass from one shore to the other of the great dream-sea; the second was an age; the third an eternity. The first was rose-hued; the second was dull; the third was filled with the grayness that blurs activity turned to mechanical action.

And on the eighth day occurred the monthly pay-day dance of the Last Chance mine. All the men were drunk, all the women were drunker, but drunkest of all was the undoubted favourite of the company, Bismarck Anne. Two men standing by the door saw nothing remarkable about that—it had happened the last week. But in that time Bismarck Anne had had her chance, she had eaten of the fruit of the Tree, and so now was in mortal sin.

THE END

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